132 INFO-PACKED PAGES

Guitar & Bass Classics

THE MARTIN GUITAR BIBLE

THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE FOR ACOUSTIC GUITAR LOVERS

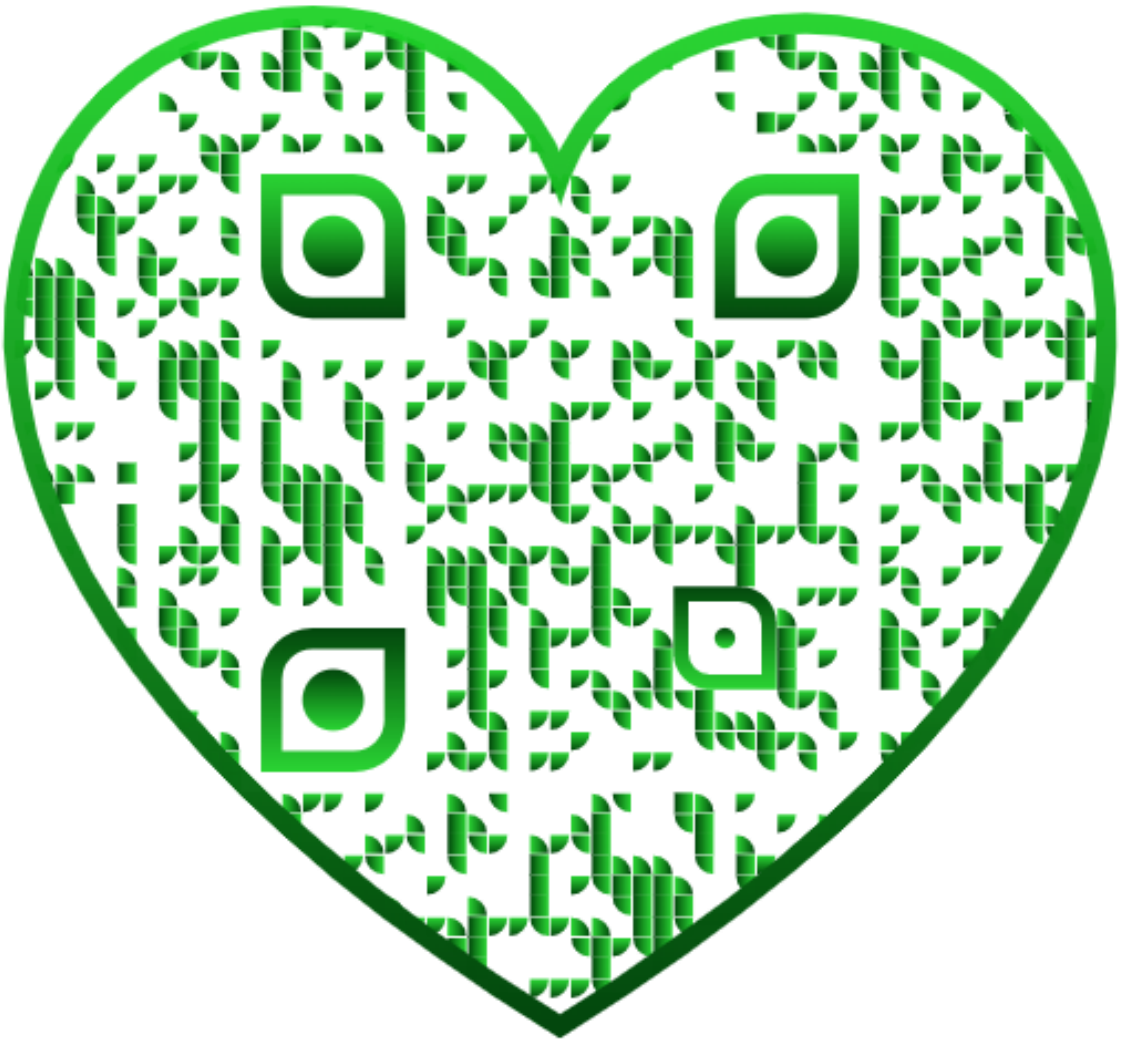
- New 2017 guitars reviewed and rated
- Artist interviews
- Essential maintenance tips
- Inside the Martin museum
- The incredible story of the world's oldest guitar brand

ANTHEM

9 771754 356006 25 >

The Martin Bible £7.99

INTERVIEWS | TIPS | REVIEWS | VINTAGE



Martin & Co.
EST. 1833

Since 1833, we've made

2,000,000 GUITARS

and not one compromise.

Two Millionth

#MartinPride
MartinGuitar.com

Guitar & Bass Classics

Anthem Publishing
Suite 6 Piccadilly House, London Road,
Bath BA1 6PL
Tel **+44 (0) 1225 489 984**
Email **guitarandbass@anthem-publishing.com**

www.guitar-bass.net

Editor **Chris Vinnicombe**
chris.vinnicombe@anthem-publishing.com

Managing Editor **Josh Gardner**
josh.gardner@anthem-publishing.com

Art Editor **Simon Middleweek**

Digital Editor **Sam Roberts**
sam.roberts@anthem-publishing.com

Contributors **Rick Batey, Michael Heatley, Huw Price, Gary Walker**

Photography **Eleanor Jane**

Additional archive material **CF Martin & Co**

ADVERTISING

Business Development Manager **Di Marsh**
di.marsh@anthem-publishing.com

Senior Sales Executive **Joe Supple**
joe.supple@anthem-publishing.com

Ad Production **Craig Broadbridge**
craig.broadbridge@anthem-publishing.com

ANTHEM PUBLISHING

CEO **Jon Bickley**
jon.bickley@anthem-publishing.com

Managing Director **Simon Lewis**
simon.lewis@anthem-publishing.com

Creative Director **Jenny Cook**
jenny.cook@anthem-publishing.com

Marketing & Production Manager **Verity Travers**
verity.travers@anthem-publishing.com

PRINT & PRODUCTION

Print **William Gibbons & Sons Ltd**
Tel **+44 (0) 1902 730011**

Distributed by **Marketforce (UK) Ltd**
5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London E14 5HU
Tel **+44 (0) 20 378 79001**

LICENSING

Regina Erak *Tel* **07753 811 622**
erak@globalworks.co.uk

SUBSCRIPTIONS & BACK ISSUES

anthem.subscribeonline.co.uk
Tel **0844 322 1291*** (UK)
Tel **800 428 3003** (US Toll Free)
Tel **+44 (0) 1795 414 781** (Rest of World)
Email **guitarandbass@servicehelpline.co.uk**
Calls cost 7p per minute plus your phone company's access charge

PPA independent publisher awards 2014 winner
Independent Publishing Company of the Year

ANTHEM PUBLISHING PPA

All content copyright Anthem Publishing Ltd 2017, all rights reserved. While we make every effort to ensure that the factual content of *Guitar & Bass* magazine is correct we cannot take any responsiblity nor be held accountable for any factual errors printed. Please make every effort to check quoted prices and product specifications with manufacturers prior to purchase. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or resold without prior consent of Anthem Publishing Ltd. *Guitar & Bass* Magazine recognises all copyrights contained within the issue. Where possible we acknowledge the copyright holder.

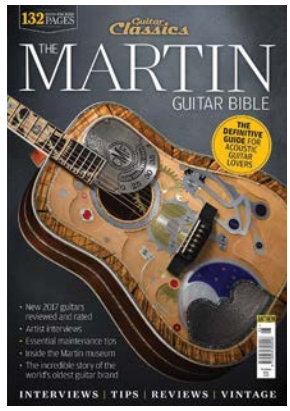
WELCOME

An American tale...

There's no doubt that history is of huge importance in the guitar industry. Of all the major brands, only CF Martin & Co can trace an unbroken line of family ownership back as far as 1833, when German immigrant Christian Fredrick Martin Sr arrived in New York City and began crafting musical instruments on Manhattan's Lower West Side. As well as being intertwined with the history of the United States of America, the story of the Martin guitar company is woven into the evolution of popular music itself.

Back in January, we were lucky enough to visit the company's Nazareth, Pennsylvania headquarters. In-house historian and archivist Dick Boak kindly showed us around the Martin Museum and allowed us to get behind the glass to photograph – and even play – choice highlights from a collection of spellbinding instruments. One thing they all had in common – whether they were manufactured during the period when Andrew Jackson sat in the White House, in the company's pre-WWII 'golden era' or examples built in more recent times – was an almost supernatural tonal quality that filled the room in a way that only the very best acoustic instruments can.

It's not all about the past though, and what this 132-page celebration of America's oldest guitar company proves is that Martin is unwilling to rest on its laurels. In 2017, the company places a high value on innovation and sustainability that should easily see it last for another 184 years and then some. Special thanks then, to all at Martin who helped us throughout a project that we hope you'll enjoy reading as much as we enjoyed compiling it. Be warned, however: if you don't own a Martin instrument already, get ready to want one...



GET IN TOUCH

FACEBOOK
facebook.com/theguitarmagazine

YOUTUBE
youtube.com/theguitarmagazine

TWITTER
@guitarmagazine

INSTAGRAM
@theguitarmagazine

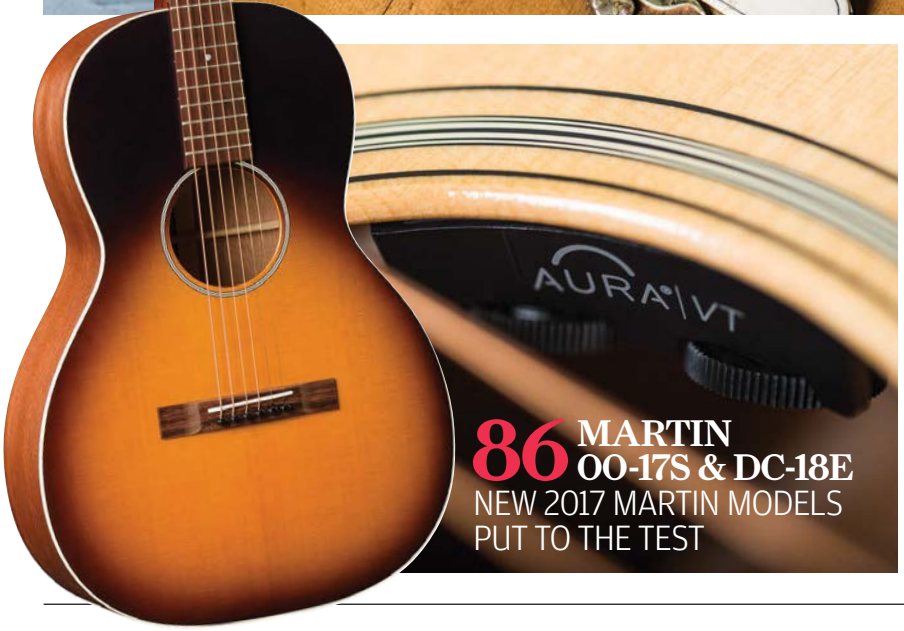
Or email **guitarandbass**
@anthem-publishing.com

SUBSCRIBE

Turn to **page 116** to take advantage of our *Guitar & Bass* subscription offer.

The Martin Guitar Bible

06 MUSEUM PIECES
THE TREASURES OF THE MARTIN MUSEUM IN STUNNING DETAIL

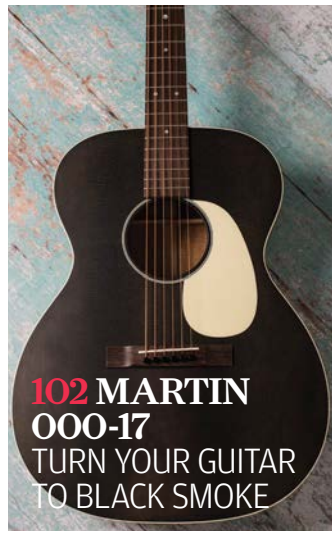


86 MARTIN 00-17S & DC-18E
NEW 2017 MARTIN MODELS PUT TO THE TEST

42 GABRIELLE APLIN
GIGGING VINTAGE MARTINS

10 MARTIN HISTORY
CHARTING THE JOURNEY OF THE MOST IMPORTANT NAME IN ACOUSTIC

32 CHRIS MARTIN IV
MARTIN'S CEO ON THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF HIS FAMILY'S FIRM



102 MARTIN 000-17
TURN YOUR GUITAR TO BLACK SMOKE

122 WORKSHOP
ESSENTIAL MARTIN MAINTAINCE TIPS

Guitar & Bass
SAVE 35%
when you subscribe today!

TURN TO PAGE 116

FEATURES

Martin history, employee interviews & artist features

Martin History.....10
Chris Martin IV..... 32
Gabrielle Aplin..... 42
Dick Boak..... 58
Tim Teel..... 76
Davey Graham..... 96
Hiss Golden Messenger..... 110

REVIEWS

New 2017 Martins on test

D-16E & DCRSG..... 52
OOLX1AE..... 72
00-17S & DC-18E.....86
000-17.....102

MUSEUM PIECES

Up close with some of the most rare and historic Martin guitars in existence

CF Martin Sr Presentation Guitar..... 6
Stauffer-style..... 28
Style 7 Bowlback Mandolin & 000-45..... 38
Martin & Schatz X-braced guitar.....48
00-45S Prototype.....68
OM-45 Deluxe..... 82
D-45..... 92
Ditson Style III Dreadnought..... 106
D-18 'Grandpa'..... 118

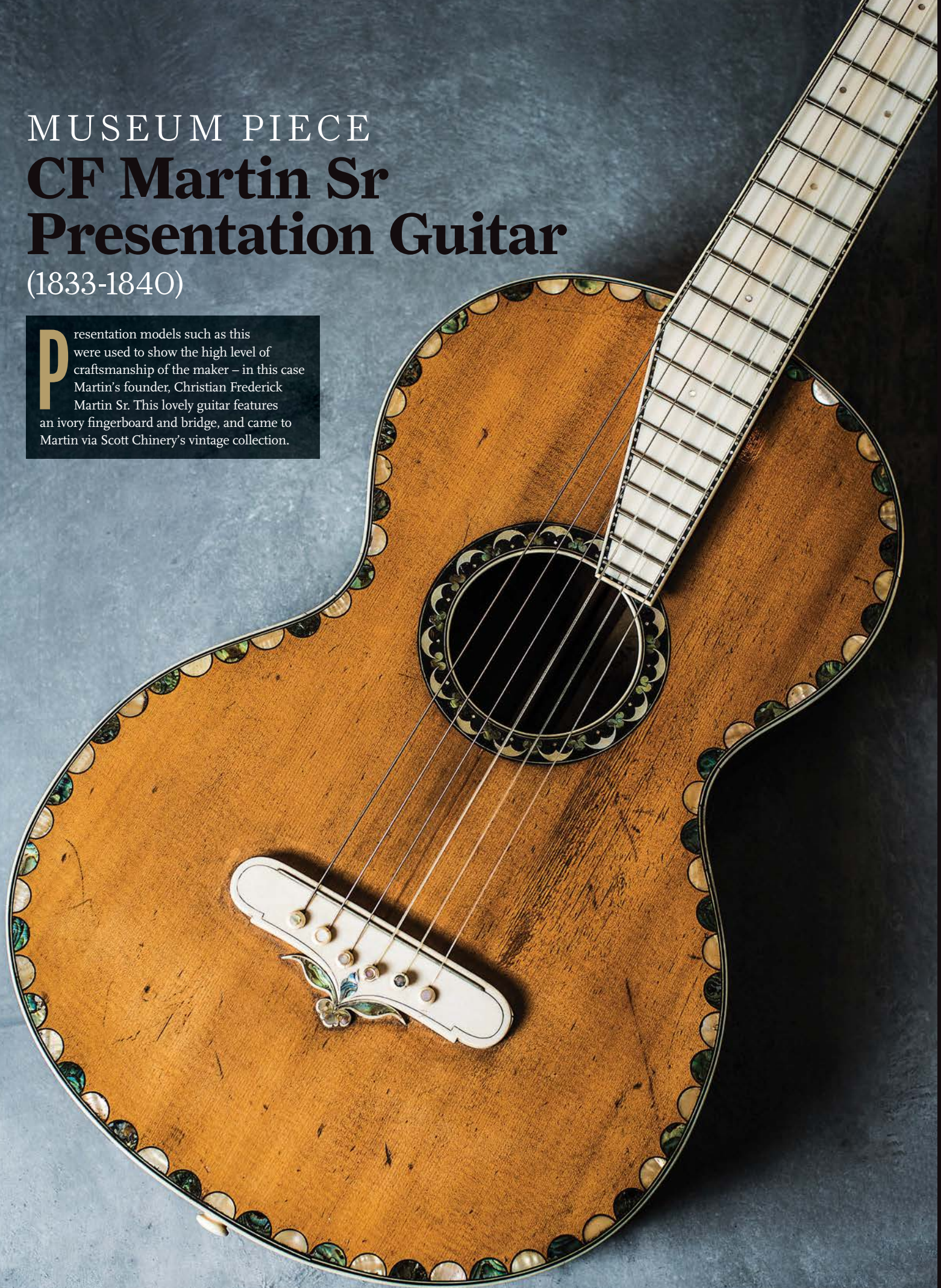
WORKSHOP

Essential Martin Maintainance Tips.....122

MUSEUM PIECE

CF Martin Sr Presentation Guitar (1833-1840)

Presentation models such as this were used to show the high level of craftsmanship of the maker – in this case Martin's founder, Christian Frederick Martin Sr. This lovely guitar features an ivory fingerboard and bridge, and came to Martin via Scott Chinery's vintage collection.



C. FREDRICK MARTIN
Guitar & Violin Manufactu
Importer of
MUSICAL INSTRUM
Hudson
198

ONCE UPON A TIME IN AMERICA

WORDS: MICHAEL HEATLEY

"You know, Martin is a company America should be really proud of. They never compromised, they've never done less than their best, they've continually made the best instruments in the world..."

David Crosby

Above **Mandolins, such as this one from the early 1900s, were a big part of Martin's success at the turn of the century, prompted by CF Martin's grandson, Frank Henry**

Right **Martin's museum displays artefacts from the company's long history of building guitars**

For very nearly two centuries now, CF Martin & Co, a family-owned company from Nazareth, Pennsylvania, has been the world's preeminent acoustic guitar maker – a reassuring presence in an ever changing musical world. While rivals have come and gone over the decades, the company founded by German immigrant Christian Friedrich (later Anglicised to Frederick) Martin in 1833 has endured – adapting to new circumstances along the way to ensure that Martin guitars remain a constant presence on stages all over the world.

There have been periods of enhanced popularity where Martin guitars have enjoyed more of the spotlight – the 'singing cowboy' boom of the 1930s, the folk and protest movement of the late 50s and the 'unplugged' craze of the 90s, to name a few – but there have also been lengthy periods of time when the electric has eclipsed its flat-top sibling in popular consciousness. Despite this, Martin has remained true to what it is – never seriously chasing the electric market or deviating from the aim of building the ultimate acoustic guitar.

The virtues of a good Martin remain the same now as they have for 183 years. And that matters. Even now, as the company brings nontraditional materials into play to combat the scarcity of certain woods and introduces product lines to compete in the intermediate market, Martin remains an iconic brand.

For many of us acoustic guitar players, owning of a Martin guitar is a milestone – connecting you with a heritage that has been a benchmark for quality for longer than many of us realise. Don't forget, CF Martin was making guitars some seven decades before Orville Gibson established his company, while Leo Fender lagged a century behind. Had Martin not brought the guitar to his adopted homeland, the history of popular music might have been rather different...

Another thing that sets Martin apart from many other guitar companies is its family ownership. The company has never sold out to a multinational, and current CEO CF 'Chris' Martin IV is the great-great-great-grandson of the founder. From a one-man workshop in New York, it grew into a factory in Nazareth – a town where it still has its HQ, and employs some 600 people today.

As previously mentioned, Martin has remained loyal to the acoustic guitar in its history. Yes, mandolins, ukuleles and, for a short time, electric guitars and basses featured in its catalogue, but when you say

Martin, you probably picture a classic flat-top acoustic guitar – and that's for good reason.

The company's history is celebrated in the Martin Museum, not only a tourist attraction at its HQ, but also a resource for the company as it recreates historic models and develops new designs. The idea of taking a step back to move forwards resonates.

NEW YORK STATE OF MIND

The guitar was born in Europe but found its natural home in the United States, so the fact Martin guitars have roots in Germany is no surprise. Yet the guitar of the 19th century wasn't the dominant instrument we recognise today: the banjo and mandolin were to remain keen competitors until the 1930s.

Christian Friedrich Martin was chased out of his native country by makers of a different instrument – the violin. Seeing its superiority under threat, the German violin-makers guild tried to have him banned from guitar manufacture, as he was a member of the rival cabinet-makers' guild. He won the court case, but, after successfully defending a later one, he decided things would be less hassle in the land of opportunity. He booked his passage aboard a Transatlantic liner and opened a guitar shop on New York's Hudson St in 1833.

Christian Friedrich Martin booked passage on a Transatlantic liner, and opened a guitar shop on New York's Hudson St in 1833

Having served an apprenticeship to renowned Viennese guitar-maker Christian Stauffer, his first

Above **A selection of early Martin sales brochures from the company archive**

Above right **Martin's association with Eric Clapton has been hugely fruitful over the last three decades**

designs bore such Stauffer hallmarks as a headstock with all the tuning keys on one side, a curving bridge design and a neck adjustment system operated by a key inserted near the heel. This unfortunately proved unstable under string tension and was abandoned.

Some Martin guitars made prior to 1840 are branded 'Martin & Schatz' and 'Martin & Coupa', acknowledging the network of teachers and wholesalers involved in distributing and selling the early products of Christian Friedrich's workshop. Heinrich Schatz had, in fact, preceded him in crossing the Atlantic with the intention of making his name in the musical-instrument world.

The main distributors for Martin guitars, Zoebisch & Sons, were based in New York City at 46 Maiden Lane. The link between the companies would endure until 1898, when Martin took on its own distribution. The move to Nazareth had happened in 1839, Martin forsaking his store in favour of full-time manufacture.

By the late 1840s, Martin had abandoned the Stauffer characteristics and a style of his own was beginning to emerge. European extravagance was now history, slotted pegheads with squared-off corners and rectangular bridges the new norm. Brazilian rosewood was adopted for back and sides, the only nod to fancy ornamentation being purfling around the edge of the guitar, around the soundhole and down the central back seam.

By the late 1840s, Martin had abandoned the Stauffer characteristics and a style of his own was beginning to emerge. European extravagance was now history

Most important of all his innovations was the X-bracing system. This arrangement of internal struts and braces consisted of two braces forming the shape of a cross across the soundboard below the top of the soundhole, a large transverse brace spanning the width of the upper bout. The bracing system is largely responsible for the distinctive Martin tone characterised by bright treble and resonant bass.

The move from New York to Nazareth – some 100 miles distant and something of a German emigrant enclave – had been a risk, but one that quickly paid off. In an advertisement in 1850 the company declared, 'CF Martin, Guitar Maker, respectfully informs the musical public generally that the great favour bestowed upon him has induced him to enlarge his factory in order to supply the increasing demand for his instruments.'

Martin built a factory at the corner of Main and North Streets, on land previously owned by the Moravian church. The since considerably expanded North Street plant is today a luthier supply store called Guitarmakers' Connection, where budding instrument makers can purchase kits and parts.

PASSING THE TORCH

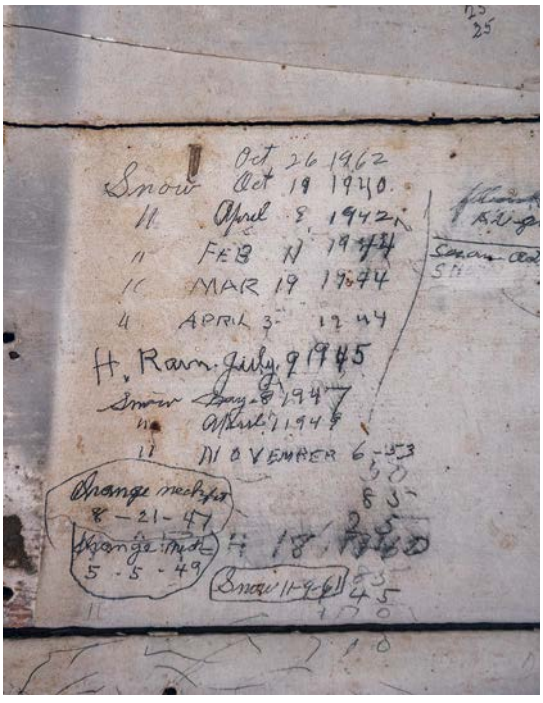
In 1867, not long after he entered his 70s, CF Martin took on his eldest son as his business partner. German-born Christian Frederick Jr, 48, would take the company forward on his father's passing in 1873.

Style designations began to be used around this time, Style 17 first being recorded in 1856 and Styles 18 and 27 the following year. Every Martin would have its own two-part model name; the first element reflected size – Size 0, the largest, through to Size 5, the smallest – and the second element the style.

The years of the Civil War (1861-65) were unexpected boom ones for Martin, as the ultra-portable guitar was a popular means of entertainment for the troops; many didn't make it home with their players, so had to be replaced. The Martin blueprint was already in place, as exemplified by designs like the 1-40 with its 'pyramid'-profile rectangular bridge and simple, classic peghead.

The 40 was one of 11 different styles in the 1870 catalogue, ranging in size prefix from 0 to 3. The levels of appointment, and therefore price, varied; the 3-17 was cheapest at $36, the 2-42 with abalone soundhole ring and borders the most expensive at $90. The size range was expanded in 1877 with the introduction of the 00, intended to compete in the unaccompanied arena with the five-string banjo.

The unexpected death of CF Martin Jr in 1888 saw his son, Frank Henry, take the reins. The product of a ›



second marriage, 22-year-old Frank had grown up working in the business like his father and grandfather before him. But he was soon confronted by a major challenge when a dispute arose with long-time main distributors Zoebisch & Sons. Ties were cut and Martin took on its own distribution. One of the reasons for this seems to have been Frank Henry's introduction of a line of mandolins.

The mandolin was the up-and-coming stringed instrument of the day, tuned like a violin and popularised by the influx of Italian immigrants into the United States. Company records reveal that mandolin production went from just three instruments in 1897 to 113 the following year – a shot in the arm with guitar production a mere 220 units. Zoebisch's reluctance to promote Martin's mandolins remains unexplained, but, following the split, instruments were branded 'Nazareth, Pa' rather than 'New York' as previously.

Not that Martin had forsaken the humble guitar. Martin products of the later 19th century were exhibiting a style all their own, the instruments' clean, uncluttered lines already on their way to classic status. And Frank Henry Martin was keen to alert the public that quality was his company watchword.

"How to build a guitar to give this tone is not a secret," he insisted in his preface to the 1904 catalogue. "It takes care and patience. Care in selecting the materials, laying out the proportions and attending to the details which add to the player's comfort. Patience in giving the necessary time to finish every part. A good guitar cannot be built for the price of a poor one, but who regrets the extra cost for a good guitar?"

This 'quality first' philosophy was reflected in the materials that Martin adopted as standard. Brazilian rosewood and Honduras mahogany, the latter introduced in 1907, remained tonal benchmarks for the rest of the 20th century. Competitors often used birch and maple on their tops and backs, sometimes painting it to emulate the rosewood. But even on Martin's cheaper lines, the 15 and 17 series, while they lacked fancy trimmings and body binding, were made of solid wood throughout.

QUALITY NOT QUANTITY

As a result of this, Martin's entry-level instruments were, understandably, more expensive than the competition. The most affordable Martin in the 1900 catalogue would set you back $25, as opposed to $10 for a similarly playable competitor.

Gibson was Martin's chief rival as the 20th century began. Martin always favoured the flat-top design with a round soundhole, while Gibson, established 1902, initially reflected its heritage as a mandolin maker with archtop guitars. The archtop, whose contours resembled the violin and other stringed instruments, produced a different tonality than the classic Spanish design on which Martin's products were based.

Martin targeted the top end of the market, never exceeding 20 per cent of Gibson's output. But that's not

> *"A good guitar cannot be built for the price of a poor one, but who regrets the extra cost for a good guitar?"*
>
> **Frank Henry Martin, 1904**

to say the company didn't react to this new threat. Gibson's archtop jazz guitars measured 18 inches wide, giving them a size advantage over the biggest Martin, the 00. In 1902 Martin responded with the 15-inch 000. In an early echo of today's environmental concerns, 1918 saw elephant ivory give way to ivory-coloured celluloid ('Ivoroid') for bindings and ebony for bridges.

Frank Henry Martin was very much hands-on in selling his company's guitars and mandolins. The majority of the company's output was personally sold to dealers in New York State and New England, while advertisements in local newspapers stimulated direct sales. Guitar production in 1920 totalled a respectable 1,361 units – and 1920 was also the year Frank Henry mounted a wooden plaque in one of the company's workrooms. It bore the Latin motto 'Non Multa Sed Multum' – literally 'not many, but much', but best rendered as 'quality not quantity'.

Martin's mandolins had been much fancier than their six-string counterparts, with engravings and pearl inlays on peghead and pickguard respectively. Frank decided that his guitars could benefit from similar adornment, so pearl fingerboard inlays slowly made their way into Martin's catalogue; 1904's Style 45 was particularly opulent, and would remain the top of the range.

But sales of such upmarket offerings failed to take off in the financially troubled first decade of the new century. Even so, Martin wouldn't compromise on the woods used for construction: the Style 17 introduced mahogany in place of rosewood for the back and sides, while mahogany replaced cedar for all necks in 1916.

If the mandolin had helped boost Martin's fortunes as the 19th century ended, then another potential rival to the guitar, the ukulele, was to provoke a similar sales spurt in the 1920s. The first Martin ukes had failed to appeal, but by reducing the amount of bracing and substituting mahogany for spruce, Martin's improved product went on to dominate the market. Nearly twice as many ukes were sold as guitars during the 1920s.

STEEL RESOLVE

The sudden passing of sales director (and the late Christian's brother) Herbert Keller Martin in 1927 came just two years before the Great Depression. This double blow caused the Martin family to abandon hopes of increasing sales and concentrate on survival. Guitar sales dropped by 50 per cent between 1929 and 1931, and a three-day week was reluctantly introduced.

After being forced to cut the pay rate of its workforce, Martin even diversified into producing violin parts and

Above **Martin's ever-growing business saw the company move into this larger factory on Nazareth's North Street in 1850**

Above left **Timbers from the North Street factory still bear the weather observations of Martin workers from the 1930s and 40s**

>

"X-bracing was wrong for gut strings, but when the world wanted steel strings and Martin took that leap, it happened to be exactly the right bracing!"

Eric Schoenberg

wooden jewellery to keep employees occupied. Few realised in the depths of such national misery that a double turning point in Martin's – and indeed guitar history – was just around the corner in the distinctive shape of the dreadnought guitar and the invention of the 14-fret neck.

These innovations signalled the beginning of the end for the banjo as a dominant instrument on the music scene. The four-string tenor banjo with metal strings, played with a plectrum, had flourished in the jazz age, but as dance music became smoother, orchestral banjoists came under pressure to 'double' on guitar.

Advances in recording technology also worked in the guitar's favour, and it became more regularly used as a studio instrument. Martin had made the switch from gut strings to steel, and this would lead to an ebony bar being embedded in the neck to counter the tension (a steel T-bar would supersede this in 1934, a steel tube in the 60s and a truss rod in 1985).

The 000 of 1926 that had kicked off Martin's steel-string period was still a predominantly 19th century design. But as steel strings became the norm, Martin's products came into their own. "X-bracing was wrong for gut strings," present-day retailer Eric Schoenberg comments. "But when the world wanted steel strings and Martin took that leap, it happened to be exactly the right bracing!"

In 1929, Atlanta banjo-player Perry Bechtel inspired Martin to create a guitar that would suit players who intended to convert. Until then, Martin's products had the traditional 12-fret neck pioneered by Spanish and classical gut-strung guitars. Bechtel's banjo had 15 frets clear of the body, and it was when he challenged Martin to equal this that history was made.

The result was the 14-fret Orchestral Model (OM) series, so named as it was designed to be played with a pick and replace banjos in jazz outfits. Martin had applied this term to all 14-fret instruments in its catalogue by the late 1930s. The 14-fret neck was so well received that Martin eventually extended the feature to all models in its line and it became the standard for the American guitar industry.

The OM lays claim to being Martin's most important guitar, and is claimed to be the first truly modern acoustic: Richard Hoover of the Santa Cruz Guitar Company believes it's "one of the best guitar designs

Above **Well-used moulds for various Martin body shapes – moulds are used to press the side timbers into the correct shape**

Left **Martin founder Christian Frederick Martin Sr, and his wife, Ottilia Kühle, who emigrated from Germany to the USA in 1833**

Opposite **Various accounts and sales ledgers from the first few years of CF Martin Sr's operation, when he was still based in New York**

>

ever – probably the coolest thing that's happened in the steel-string world." Yet while the small-bodied OM remains popular today, it was to be eclipsed by the much-imitated dreadnought.

DREAD' LOCKED

The dreadnought had been around since 1916 when examples were sold under the Ditson brand name. It had been developed in partnership by Frank Martin and Harry Hunt, manager of leading music retailer Chas H Ditson, with the intention of creating the ideal guitar for accompanying singers. Its initial unpopularity was deceptive, as it was merely ahead of its time.

Martin fully incorporated the dreadnought into its line of guitars in 1931 and, as folk singing became increasingly popular, sales picked up. The square-shouldered model, named after an unsinkable type of battleship, remains a Martin stalwart today, while virtually every maker of acoustic guitars has a counterpart on catalogue.

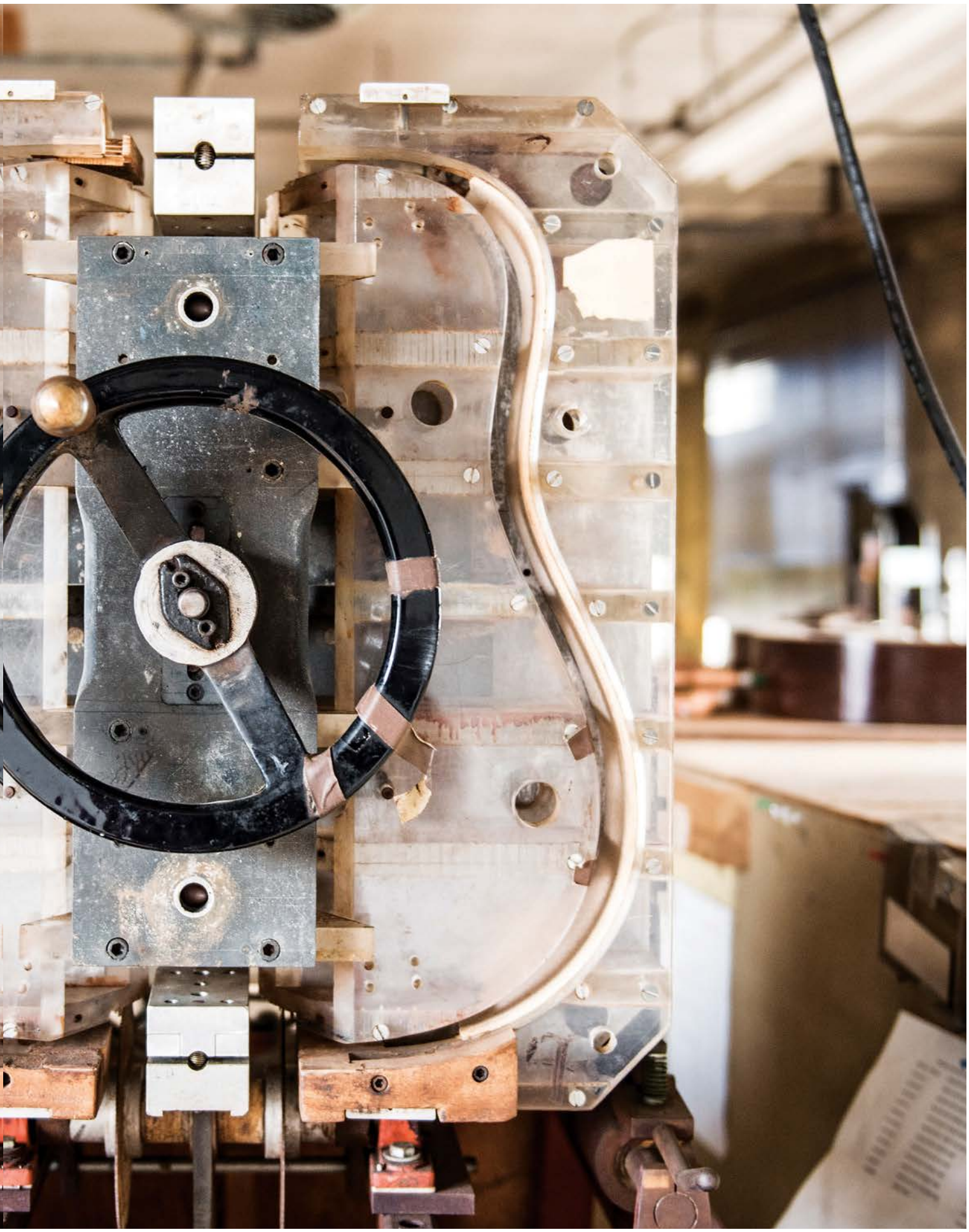
The centenary of the dreadnought, dating from its first sighting, was celebrated in 2016 by a film documentary, *Ballad Of The Dreadnought*, which was screened by a number of prestigious film festivals and is available to view online (bit.ly/martinballad).

As the amplified guitar became integrated into jazz, its unamplified sister suffered. But country music was to prove the acoustic – and Martin's – salvation

As the amplified guitar became integrated into the jazz band format through the likes of Charlie Christian, its unamplified sister suffered. But country music was to prove the acoustic – and Martin's – salvation. The D-18 and rosewood-bodied D-28 put the dreadnought on the map in the thirties, while the D-45, custom-made for singing cowboy Gene Autry in 1933, would become a favourite of Neil Young, among others, when it was reintroduced in the late 1960s.

Autry was a huge star at the time and it was he who started a trend of having the artist's name inlaid in letters on the fingerboard. This may have seemed a trifle crude by Martin's genteel, restrained standards, but exposure in Autry's 1934 movie, *Tumbling Tumbleweeds*, was consolation. Country stars following his Martin example included Hank Williams, Ernest Tubb, Lester Flatt, Hank Snow, Kitty Wells, Red Foley and Eddy Arnold. Elsewhere, 'Singing Brakeman' Jimmie Rodgers had been playing Martin's 00-18 since the mid 1920s, moving to the 000-45 in 1928.

Wartime restrictions on materials caused Martin headaches. The top-of-the-line D-45 was discontinued in 1942 for this reason, after less than 100 had been made. The Style 28's herringbone wood marquetry was dropped due to supply difficulties – the material was sourced from Germany! – while scalloped bracing was ›



Any self-respecting singer-songwriter of the 1960s would not be seen without their Martin. By 1971, 5,466 dreadnoughts were made compared to only 507 in 1961

Above CF Martin III (centre) with Dave Guard and Bob Shane (left), and Nick Reynolds (far right) of The Kingston Trio. The trio significantly grew the appeal of folk music, and helped sell a lot of Martin guitars, too...

Top right Country stars were giving way to pop icons in the 1960s, but Johnny Cash would straddle both worlds with his unmistakable black-finished Martin

also abandoned; the shift to heavier strings required stronger bracing.

THE BOOM DECADE

When peace arrived, prosperity and the demand for leisure pastimes meant that demand for Martin guitars exceeded production. This was the first problem faced by CF Martin III, who had assumed the presidency of the company on Frank's death in 1948, Known as Fred, he was 51 when taking the helm, a comparative veteran compared to his father, and remains today the most accomplished musician to head the family firm.

Fred Martin was not happy with the situation he inherited. "When someone walks into a music store with several hundred dollars and asks for a Martin guitar, he wants it then, not three years later," he stated. Later, he reflected that "Our lack of production capacity at the time cost us sales and strained our relationships with our dealer family."

Faced with a 100-year-old factory that had long since hit its annual production limit of 6,000, Martin made the decision to build a larger plant. The new 62,000 square-foot Sycamore Street facility in upper Nazareth was all on one floor and, while craftsmanship remained at the heart of Martin's methods, the flow of materials meant increased output without sacrificing quality. That was in 1964; the following year saw annual production hit five figures.

This impressive growth spurt had been fuelled by the folk boom of the 1950s. Guitar and banjo had joined forces in the ranks of Flatt and Scruggs and the Weavers, predominant acts in bluegrass and folk as the decade began. Lester Flatt and Fred Hellerman between them made sales of acoustics go through the roof – both played Martins – but the Kingston Trio, formed in San Francisco, broadened the appeal of folk music and guitars in exponential fashion.

Their version of traditional murder ballad *Tom Dooley* hit Number 1 in 1958, encouraging American youths to pick up six-strings. Their appeal was not based on virtuosity – their hits could happily be strummed along to. You can trace the development of this guitar-based music, overlaid with vocal harmonies, through to the Byrds in the 60s and, the Eagles a decade later.

Any self-respecting songwriter of the 1960s would not be seen without their Martin. Stephen Stills became a collector, and today has an impressive collection of vintage Martins himself. Judy Collins lit up the folk world with her Martin 12-string, while session man-turned-solo star Ry Cooder's father bought him a Martin 000-18 when he was 10, and it has since featured on nearly all his records. This was Martin's boom decade: in 1971, 5,466 Dreadnoughts were made as compared with only 507 in 1961.

The 1970s found Martin in acquisition mode, diversifying into banjos, drums and – more importantly – strings, via the Darco String Company that still remains part of the family. But guitar production was not neglected, hitting an all-time high of 22,637 in 1971.

A state-of the-art sawmill built to cut imported logs for musical veneer was not a huge success, as Brazilian rosewood imports ceased not long thereafter. This was an early indication of a growing problem, and environmental concerns were to play an increasing role in Martin's thinking over the following decades. Nevertheless 26,600 square feet was added to the Sycamore Street facility in 1975 to accommodate new office space, wet spray booths and machine room.

Building abroad for cost reasons began in 1970 in limited form with the Sigma guitar range, ›

Above This photo of the Spahr Mandolin & Guitar Club of Hoboken, New Jersey is from the early 1900s – notice the peghead shapes of the guitars on display...

manufactured in Japan and, later, Korea or Taiwan. Each instrument was brought into the Martin factory to be inspected and adjusted before going on sale. 2007 was Sigma's last year of manufacture as a Martin-owned brand. Some lower-priced Martins are now manufactured in Martin's Mexico facilty.

I WANT MY MTV

After spending much of its history building restrained instruments, gradually, a flashier side to Martin was emerging. America's Bicentennial was celebrated in 1976 with the D-76 guitar featuring a pearl eagle headstock and star-shaped fretboard inlays. In 1979, a Custom Shop was opened, while Limited Edition and Special Edition programmes would follow in the 80s.

The helm then skipped a generation; Frank Herbert Martin, who effectively ran the company in the 70s, was not to succeed his father as chairman. Upon CF Martin III's death in 1986, it was his grandson, CF Martin IV, who was given responsibility for leading into the next century. He remains Martin's CEO today.

Chris Martin's arrival from Boston University in the 1970s, with a business degree to his name, happened when demand for acoustic guitars had dropped thanks to the rise of synthesiser-based dance music. "I came back with ideas about continuous improvement, and because of the market, there was willingness here to shift gears," Chris recalls.

As the disco boom abated, the acoustic received a huge boost thanks to an 80s revival in roots, folk and bluegrass music – not to mention the 'unplugged' phenomenon of the 1990s. MTV's *Unplugged* series saw artists as diverse as Eric Clapton and Kurt Cobain strap on an acoustic guitar for the benefit of the cameras, inadvertently creating an ultra-fashionable genre that still resonates today with modern Martin players Ed Sheeran and John Mayer.

Clapton in particular was key to Martin's association: his first *MTV Unplugged* performance in 1992 saw him playing his 000-42. This individual instrument, which achieved even greater notoriety after featuring on the cover of the multi-platinum *Unplugged* album, was sold

Above **Martin now uses its North Street factory as a luthier's supply shop for budding instrument makers**

guitar, with a solid spruce top and solid mahogany back and sides, has also been up Mount Everest.

Back on earth Chris Martin was ringing the changes. Martin's 'Signature Series' was launched with the reissue of Gene Autry's 12-fret D-45S from 1933. The project proved highly successful, and the likes of Eric Clapton, Johnny Cash and Marty Stuart would in turn be accorded their own signature models. This reversed the long-standing policy not to engage in endorsement deals, the impetus coming in part from Dick Boak, now director of the Martin museum and archives.

Martin's age and tradition still counted for much, but were not enough on their own to ensure the company thrived rather than just survived. How to maintain its position without diluting the brand was a problem that had to be tackled, and Martin was suitably bullish. "Under Chris's direction," the company proudly stated in 1986, "the company will embark on a new era of computer-assisted production, experimentation in tone woods, body styles, trims and virtually unlimited custom options." In 1995 19,500 square feet was added to the factory to accommodate string production.

at auction in 2004 for $791,500 – then the highest price ever paid for an acoustic. One of 18 Martins sold to benefit Clapton's Crossroads charity, it has since been exhibited at the Rock And Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland and the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

CHANGING TIMES

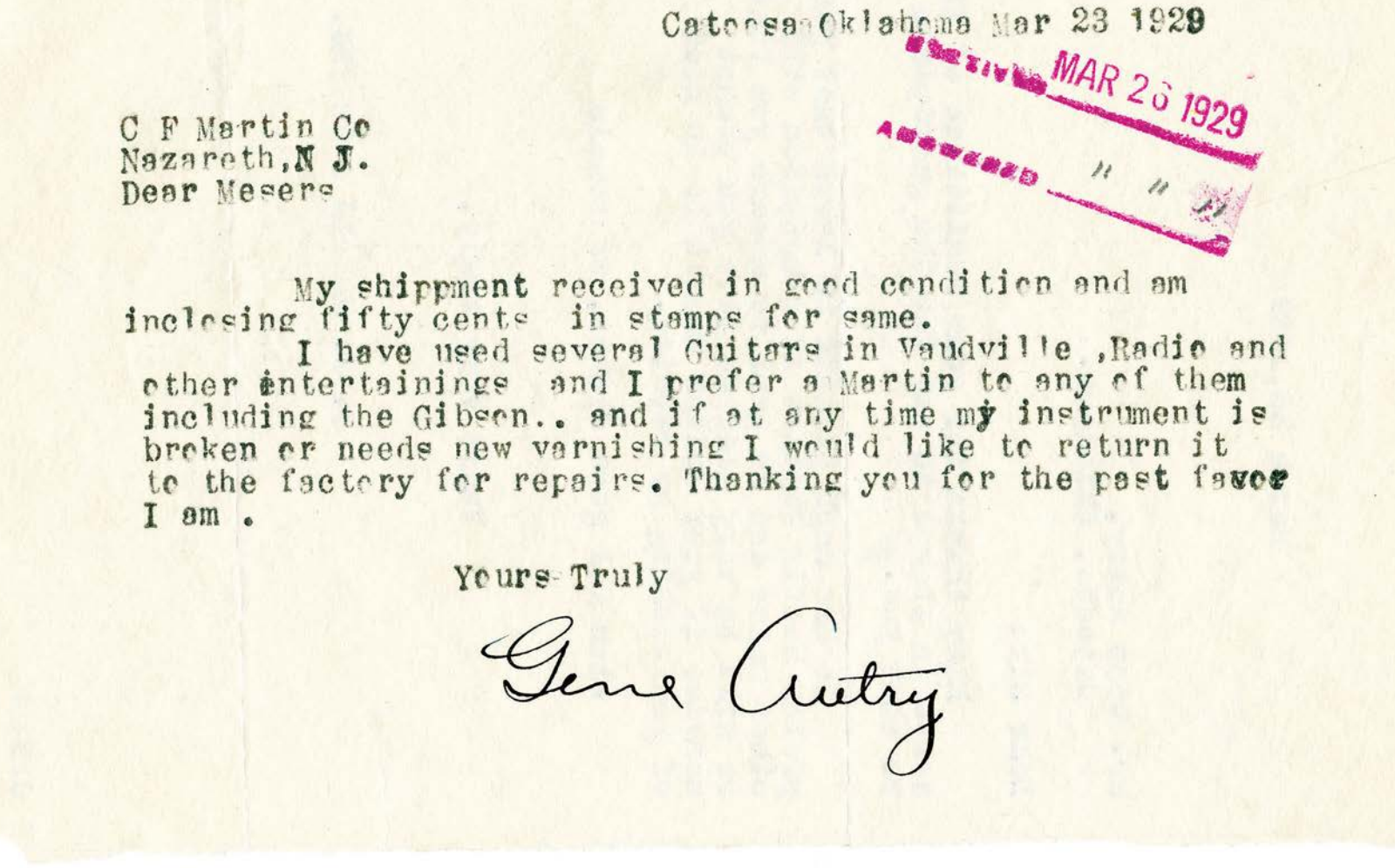
But Martin's domination of the market alongside Gibson had been far from unchallenged. Competitors, most notably Yamaha, had used Asian factories to bring down costs and produce quality instruments in a variety of more affordable price brackets. New entrants such as Ovation and Takamine had made innovations including piezoelectric pickups and onboard electronics industry standards, while companies including Taylor had caught the zeitgeist, using modern manufacturing processes and revisiting classic designs. Could Martin react?

One answer came in the shape of the Backpacker travel guitar, which made history when the crew of the Space Shuttle took one into Earth orbit in 1994. The

The Backpacker travel guitar made history when the crew of the Space Shuttle took one into Earth orbit in 1994, and it has also been up Mount Everest

The introduction of computer-driven machinery was aimed to increase production without losing Martin quality: "State-of-the-art meets state-of-the heart," as the company literature termed it. The pace of production has certainly increased in recent years: only 14 years would elapse between Martin building its 500,000th guitar, in 1990, and its millionth. (The 500,000th instrument, an HD-28 signed by all employees, remains on display at the factory today.)

Retaining its hard-won reputation as a premium product in such circumstances was quite an achievement. Yet fundamental changes to the acoustic market forced Martin's hand to offer more affordable



Catoosa Oklahoma Mar 23 1929

RECEIVED MAR 26 1929
ANSWERED " " "

C F Martin Co
Nazareth, N J.
Dear Messrs

My shippment received in good condition and am inclosing fifty cents in stamps for same.
I have used several Guitars in Vaudville, Radio and other entertainings and I prefer a Martin to any of them including the Gibson.. and if at any time my instrument is broken or needs new varnishing I would like to return it to the factory for repairs. Thanking you for the past favor I am.

Yours Truly

Gene Autry

Above **A letter from cowboy country icon Gene Autry acknowledging receipt of his Martin guitars – Autry's patronage would help put Martin on the map in the 1930s**

products in a bid to attract mid-level purchasers. This involved considering nontraditional construction materials in place of expensive woods (for example sides and necks carved from sipo, a close relative of mahogany), and also building guitars in Mexico where, since the early 1990s, Martin's Navajoa factory has turned out strings, ukuleles and Backpackers.

X APPEAL

The X Series, introduced in 1998, had combined revolutionary new materials such as HPL (high-pressure laminate) tops – wood fibres designed to look and feel like natural wood at less cost – and computer-aided manufacturing. Other new materials included Stratabond, a laminated hardwood product used in X Series necks, and resin-based Richlite used for fingerboards and bridges.

By 2004, the millionth Martin guitar was produced, 171 years after CF Martin Sr moved the company to Nazareth; a jewel-encrusted dreadnought marked the occasion

As the new millennium dawned, Chris Martin wasn't prepared to rest on his laurels. "My personal goal is to take our company from 'Not many, but much' to 'Many – and much.'" By the end of 2001,the latest of 780,500 Martin guitars had emerged to back up his words.

But tradition was still accorded respect. A new Martin museum and visitor centre occupying nearly 3,200 square feet opened in 2005. "It has been my dream for many years to expand our little museum into something very special that can do justice in presenting our incredible story to the many thousands of people who visit the factory every year to take the tour," noted Chris Martin. "Finally that dream has come to fruition."

By 2004, the millionth Martin guitar was produced, 171 years after CF Martin Sr moved the company to Nazareth; a suitably jewel-encrusted dreadnought marked the occasion.

The next half-million instruments flooded out in an amazing seven years. To commemorate the milestone, Martin unveiled the Da Vinci Unplugged guitar at the 2011 winter NAMM Show. This extravagantly engraved one-off was impressive, but the current crop of less elaborate instruments better reflects Martin's success in broadening appeal.

The company moved production of its DXM series to Navojoa, in 2004. "Change is difficult, and we decided to make this change ourselves. It's better than having something uglier being forced upon us," Chris said.

10 years later, when Navojoa celebrated its 25th anniversary, Chris Martin was understandably more upbeat, pronouncing it "an extraordinarily positive endeavour on all fronts (that) has allowed us to expand our product line and reach different customers without sacrificing our standard of quality or our domestic workforce." Having started by employing 12 people, the Mexican head count had increased to 450 – and not one was at the expense of the Nazareth workforce.

The Mexican-made DRSGT (Dreadnought Road Series) and 000RSGT (000 Road Series), unveiled in 2014, were representative of Martin's lowest-cost

Above Blues legend Muddy Waters playing a 00-18E in the 1960s

instruments built with all-solid wood. The midrange Performing Artist Series, with cutaway bodies, offered greater hand-detailing and the more capable F1 Analogue preamp and pickup system on acoustic-electric models.

The Retro Series, introduced two years earlier, had combined the look of vintage instruments – D-18E, D-45E, HD-28E and OM-28E– with Fishman electronics and enhanced playability, while the Authentic Series drew on Martin's history with hide glue and Adirondack spruce tops. A recent innovation, Martin's Vintage Tone System, aged tops and braces to produce instruments that are supposedly closer to pre-war tonality.

Today's acoustic guitar market is arguably the most vibrant for decades, with small companies and individual luthiers producing work of outstanding quality. But there is still a place for Martin. And proof, if any were needed, came in the shape of the company's two millionth guitar, unveiled in January 2017. This milestone model, based on a D-45 body, featured a custom working timepiece built into its headstock. If any guitar could be said to be a time machine, maybe it was a Martin...

Christian Friedrich Martin brought his guitars to the United States, and his successors have succeeded in retaining his company's position as one of its pre-eminent names. The mission statement on the company website proclaims their aim: "To be an organization of dedicated co-workers committed to exceptional leadership and innovation in the fretted instrument and string manufacturing industries, while celebrating our heritage and traditions as a family-owned company."

And Martin's concerns don't end at the Nazareth county line: in recent years, the company has begun helping communities in other countries become more economically sustainable, reducing their need to clear-cut trees to support themselves financially. A low-energy kiln in a Guatemalan community, for instance, increased the value of the wood they used and, by reusing wood previously discarded, helped reduce the amount of trees the community had to harvest.

Artists as diverse as Elvis Presley and Ed Sheeran have been proud to own a Martin in their lifetimes. They may not all have a price-tag as rich as the D-28 played by Presley in his last concert, which made $106,200 at auction in 2009, let alone Clapton's record-breaker, but they're all part of the rich heritage of one of the greatest American guitar brands.

CRACKING THE MARTIN CODE

The key to understanding Martin's two-part model numbers is to appreciate that the first figure or letter denotes size. The second refers to the materials used in its construction, plus the level of decoration and ornamentation it displays.

Guitars with the same prefix will be of identical size. The only exception is the difference between a 12- and 14-fret neck, the latter having a slightly (less than one inch) shorter body size.

0 (Concert), **00** (Grand Concert), **000** (Auditorium) = the largest numerical Martins

D (Dreadnought), **M** (Grand Auditorium), **J** (Jumbo) = larger alphabetical sizes (beyond 0,00, etc)

The higher the suffix, the more expensive the wood and/or the accoutrements

15 Mahogany top, back and sides, with rosewood fingerboard and bridge. With no binding on the body, this the least ostentatious Martin guitar

16 1960s model featuring spruce top, mahogany back and sides, rosewood fretboard and bridge; dark binding on top

17 All-mahogany version of the Style 15, but sometimes with bound top and back

18 Spruce top, mahogany back and sides, dark bound top and back. Fretboards and bridges were made of rosewood since the 1950s, ebony since 2012

21 The Model 21 is the same as the Model 18, but with rosewood back and sides

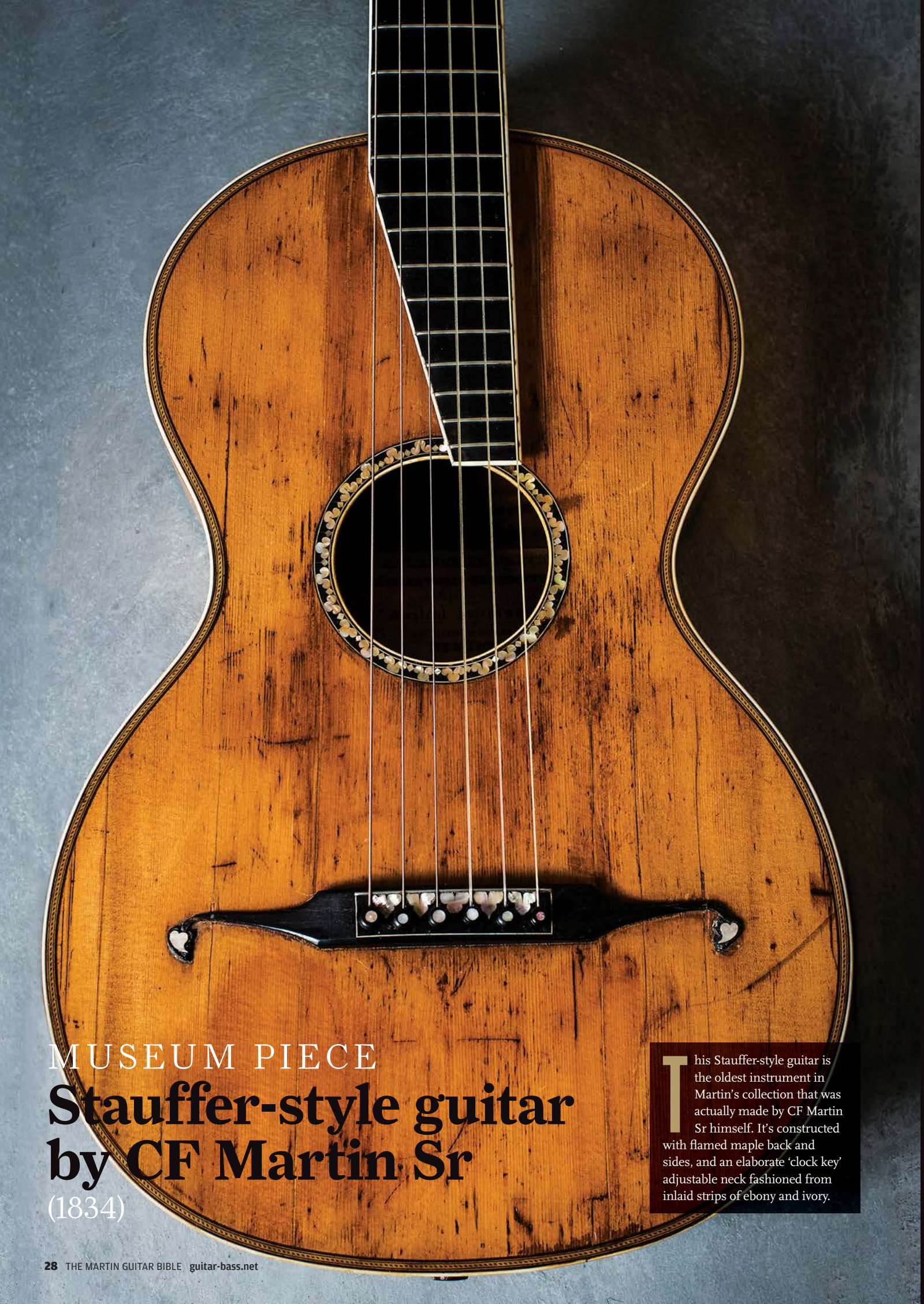
28 The most popular Martin style has spruce top and rosewood back and sides. This, like all numerically superior models, has an ebony fretboard and bridge and is bound with white plastic. Pre-1947 and some post-1976 examples featured herringbone trim

35 Introduced in 1965 to use smaller pieces of rosewood, its back is made of three pieces; top is spruce

41 Rosewood back and sides with spruce top, as the Model 35. Abalone hexagon fretboard inlays feature on the bound neck and abalone trim around the body

45 Same as the Model 41, but with added abalone trim on back and sides. Traditionally the most ornate Martin model

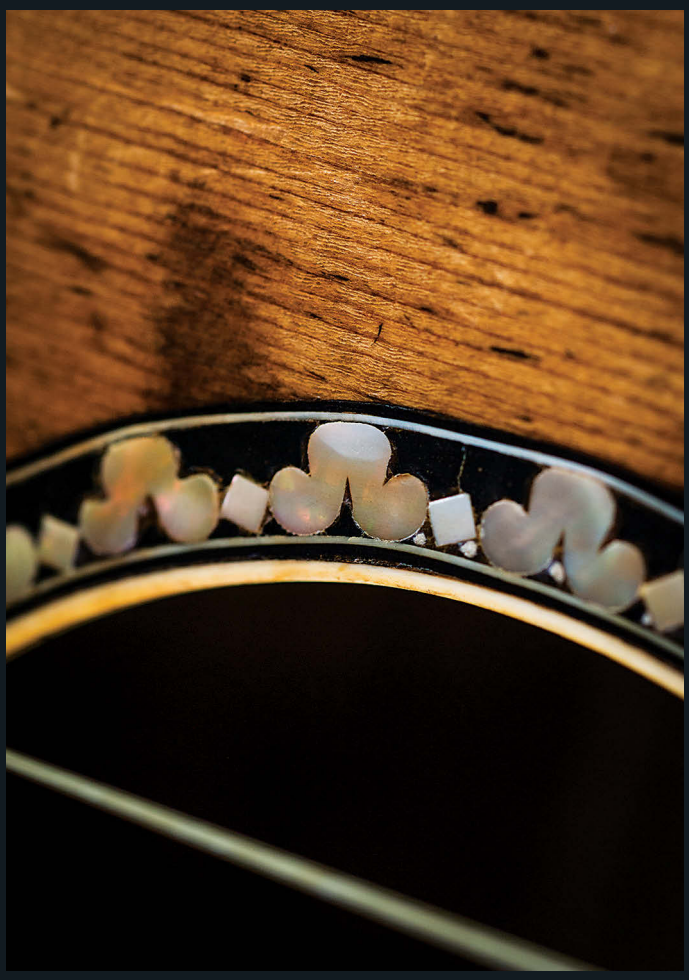
50 The most spectacular – and expensive – limited edition yet, crafted from rare Brazilian rosewood with a pearl inlay



MUSEUM PIECE

Stauffer-style guitar by CF Martin Sr (1834)

This Stauffer-style guitar is the oldest instrument in Martin's collection that was actually made by CF Martin Sr himself. It's constructed with flamed maple back and sides, and an elaborate 'clock key' adjustable neck fashioned from inlaid strips of ebony and ivory.



C·F·MARTIN
NEW·YORK

Martin&Co.
EST. 1833

The Ties That Bind

Words: **Huw Price**

With a famous name comes great responsibility but Chris Martin IV sees his family legacy as an opportunity rather than an obligation...

Having been appointed Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer in 1986, Chris Martin IV has presided over a period of significant growth for the company that bares his name, and seen significant changes in the industry along the way. In addition to honouring the Martin legacy, Chris has had to grapple with environmental concerns, sustainability issues and ever-increasing legislation regarding the use and export of traditional tonewoods. He has also been the driving force behind the development of Martin's X Series guitars, which necessitated a re-examination of the way acoustic guitars are designed and constructed. Here he describes how a guitar company, whose founder built his first guitar over 200 years ago, stays ahead of the game.

It certainly took Martin longer to get to its 1 millionth guitar than its 2 millionth, what were the factors that enabled you to ramp up production so dramatically?

"Well in a word, demand. Our business has been cyclical for a hundred and 80-something years and we found ourselves in a major up-cycle after the down-cycle that occurred during the late-70s and early 80s. A lot of people attribute that to *MTV Unplugged* because that reminded people not to dismiss the acoustic guitar.

"We have benefitted from the fact that Martin is the standard by which everybody else is judged"

Above Chris posing with the 2 Millionth Martin model at the Winter NAMM Show 2017

"From that point onwards we saw demand increase and I've seen that Western music has become more accepted around the world. Now if you play American or British acoustic guitar music anywhere other than the US or Great Britain, you might want to play it on a fine quality acoustic guitar. So we have benefitted from the fact that we are the standard by which everybody else is judged.

"I can tell you now that business is a little challenging. So my perspective is that here we are celebrating this milestone while we're seeing a business cycle in transition. The US Dollar is extremely strong, which is not helping our exports. Some of our dealers are challenged now because there's this whole debate about whether customers want to walk into a store to buy a product or look at a computer screen to buy one.

"Martin guitars, like most guitars these days, are so consistent that people seem to be willing to buy without trying. We have one very good internet company that offers a 30-day return with free shipping, and that's great customer service without having to set foot in the store. Good retail stores work the internet hard and have websites that mimic the experience of being in their store. When a website exudes the same culture, that's where we're seeing success.

"We're doing a program now called 'Factory Delivery' where you buy your guitar from a Martin dealer and then you show up at the factory once it's built and get to pick it up personally. Well today we had one where the dealer and the customer came together. The dealer is from Chicago and the customer was from Virginia and they just hooked up on the internet."

The 2 Millionth Martin is a significant milestone for the company but can you identify any others?

"Last year was the 100th anniversary of the dreadnought guitar and this year is the formal 100th anniversary of us getting into the ukulele business. Before that we were just testing the waters but it was 100 years ago that we first put a Martin ukulele in our catalogue to promote it as a standard model. 2015 was the 50th anniversary of the D-35 and it came about because of a desire to be frugal with a diminishing supply of

Brazilian rosewood. We didn't invent the three-piece back but we devised it to utilise Brazilian rosewood that wasn't acceptable for two-piece backs."

So in a sense it anticipated the environmental concerns that are now prevalent throughout the guitar industry?
"Right – because although I wasn't around, I can't imagine that switchover from Brazilian to Indian rosewood was a walk in the park. It must have been like, 'Wait a minute, what do you mean we can't buy the woods we've been using for over a hundred years?' But no, we had to find an alternative."

You are known to take an active personal interest in sustainability issues...
"You know I joke with people and say I don't want my 12-year-old daughter to go to a trade show some day wearing a t-shirt saying, 'Martin guitars aren't being made any more because my Daddy cut down the last tree'! I have to say it's a selfish standpoint but I feel good about it. It's challenging because the work we've all done to convince the consumer that the finest guitars are made from rare exotic timber, we did a little too well. Convincing people otherwise isn't easy.

"Some of it is about asking ourselves what we can do and some of it is asking how we can comply with the Lacey Act with this new mandate from CITES about having more documentation around the export of rosewood guitars. The good thing is we seem to have a pretty good reputation so government agencies are not suspect of us from the beginning. So long as we show them that we are trying to comply they seem to be quite willing to work with us.

"One of the issues is that many of these agencies are woefully under-staffed. So when there's a new mandate we have to be the ones who put the stamp of approval

Above Chris became Martin's CEO in 1986, and has guided the company to huge success in the following decades

on the new paperwork. They're not going to give us 10 extra employees to process the paperwork, so we have to use the ones we have and that's challenging."

How open are you to exploring laminates and nontraditional materials?
"I'm more open to it than some of my colleagues to be honest with you. I'm willing to go beyond wood. For instance we have the High Pressure Laminate, which is actually wood, but processed quite a bit by man. I'm also willing to look at synthetic materials and I think carbon fibre guitars are pretty cool. But I think they're over- priced and if somebody could figure out how to build a $999 carbon fibre guitar, I think they'd sell a lot of them."

The Martin family story is almost the quintessential American Dream tale, so how does it make you feel to be part of that legacy?
"To be honest I try not to think about it because it's a little bit overwhelming. I just try to carry on. The nice thing is that everybody who works here feels a part of it, so it's not a burden I carry alone. In fact it's not a burden it's an opportunity.

"I ran into a guy at a trade show and he said, 'Mr Martin can I tell you what I think of your business?" I figured he was going to tell me anyway so I said sure, go ahead. He said 'I think Martin has one foot planted firmly in the past and one foot planted firmly in the future.' I thought, that's pretty cool, I'll take that."

Is it true you spent some time working on the factory floor when you were younger?
"Yes. My parents were divorced so I was not exposed to the business for most of my youth other than coming to stay with my father and grandparents for a week or two in the summer. But I began to take an interest in it and I did a tour out in the plant watching guitars being built and helping out a bit between high school and college.

"Then I got a job in a music store while I was in college and realised I knew nothing about the business. So when I left college I came back and lived with my grandfather and spent time in the factory quickly learning as many jobs as I could. Some I learned to do well and some I did not to be honest with you. Setting the neck of a compound dovetail is not easy at all. I would do each job for a two-week stint and by then end I really needed to get out of there because I was actually making the guitars worse. I always tell people I'm dangerous with a chisel.

"The main thing I learned was a great deal of respect for the folks that do it every day. They're at the peak of their craft and we divide up the labour. By dividing up the labour we have experts in departments. They're not building whole guitars but instead parts of guitars at extremely high levels of quality and efficiency."

Above The 2 Millionth Martin comes along less than two decades after the 1 Millionth guitar

"I'm willing to go beyond wood. I'm also willing to look at synthetic materials and I think carbon fibre guitars are pretty cool"

You must be extremely proud of the 2 Millionth Martin guitar...
"I am. The initial idea was that we didn't have an idea. For the one-millionth guitar I was involved right from the beginning. I told Larry Robinson, who did the bulk of the work on that, that I wanted to honour some European aesthetic traditions. This time I didn't get any brainwave so Tim Teel came to me and said, 'What do you think about using the theme of a watch?'

"Now people collect guitars and watches, and sometimes they collect both. Then the more I thought about it, I realised it was a great way to acknowledge the time we have been in business and how important keeping time I when you make music. It's like that Steve Miller lyric, 'Time keeps slipping into the future' – there are so many analogies. Then when we found Roland Murphy, who makes watches by hand just like we make guitars, and he's here in Pennsylvania, that sealed the deal."

Obviously it looks stunning, but what does the 2 Millionth Martin actually sound like?
"Well I'll tell you we may just be on the edge of affecting the tone with a wee bit too much inlay. It's like those European court guitars that had more inlay than wood. They didn't sound the best, but the king was happy and nobody lost their heads."

Buy online here

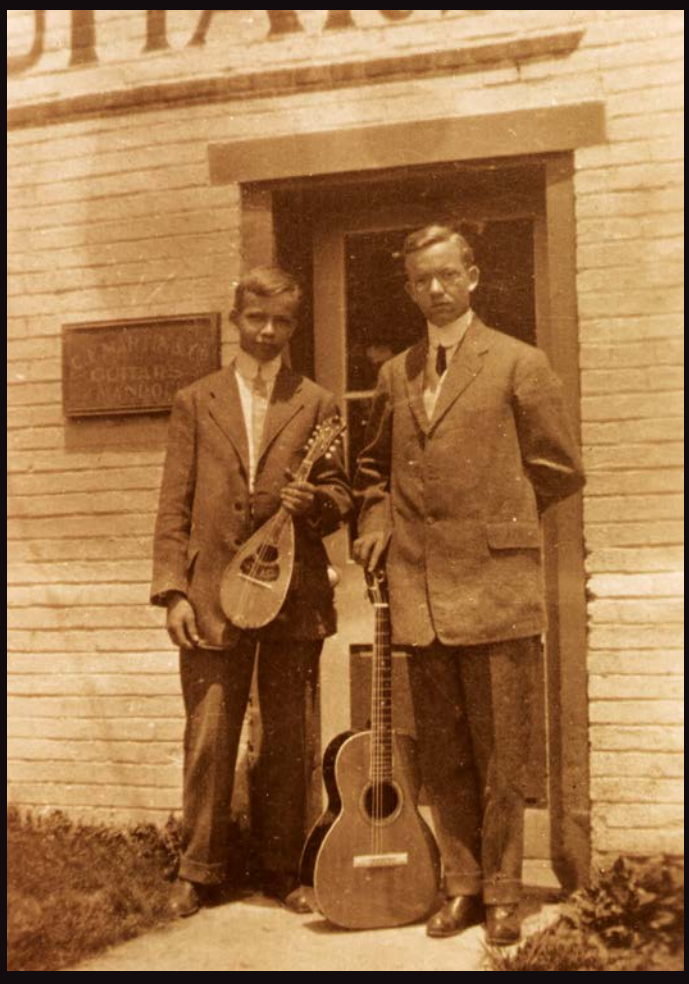
anthem.subscribeonline.co.uk /guitar-bass-magazine-back-issues

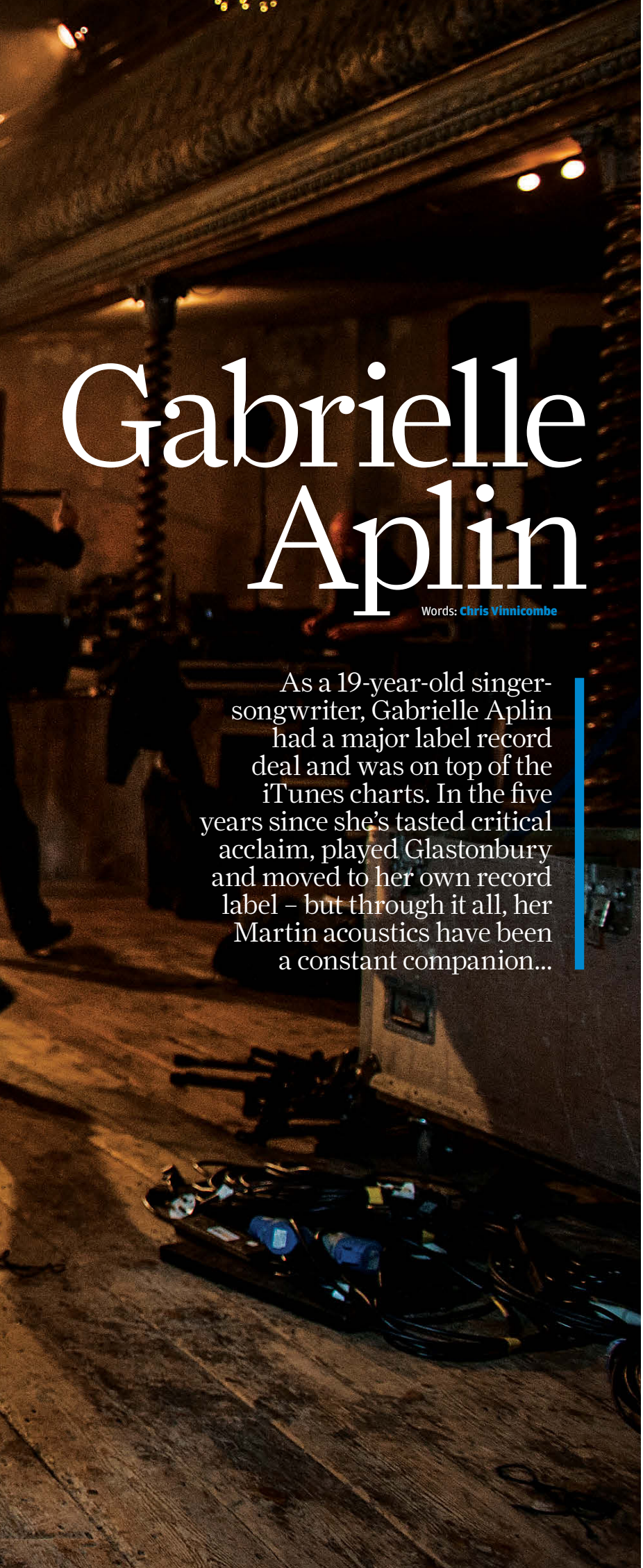
MUSEUM PIECE

Style 7 Bowlback Mandolin & 000-45

(1908, serial 2400 & 1911, serial 11353)

The Style 7 was Martin's top-of-the-line mandolin during this period, and this example was made by CF Martin III for his brother, Herbert Keller Martin (pictured). The 000-45 was CF Martin III's personal instrument, and was clearly customised by him, as it varies from other 000-45s of this period in several ways. The fingerboard has no inlays, and there's also no pearl binding around the 'board itself. The headstock is also different, and is similar to a guitar made by Martin for American classical guitar virtuoso, Vahdah Olcott-Bickford.





Gabrielle Aplin

Words: **Chris Vinnicombe**

As a 19-year-old singer-songwriter, Gabrielle Aplin had a major label record deal and was on top of the iTunes charts. In the five years since she's tasted critical acclaim, played Glastonbury and moved to her own record label – but through it all, her Martin acoustics have been a constant companion...

Gabrielle Aplin is nothing if not well-rested. "I've been doing lots of sleeping today," she admits at the outset of our conversation – but she's clearly not one to rest on her laurels. Since she came to the public's attention with *that* cover of *The Power Of Love* on *that* John Lewis Christmas advert in 2012, the Wiltshire native has released two major label albums, the most recent of which, *Light Up The Dark* peaked at number two in the UK album charts. Since our conversation, Aplin has also revealed that she's parting ways with her label, Parlophone, announcing that she'll release new material through her own Never Fade Records.

For an artist who's still just 24, it's a bold move, but when listening to *Light Up The Dark*, it all makes sense. Though Aplin's wonderful vocals remain front and centre, it feels more ambitious and experimental than her 2013 debut, *English Rain*, with a more fully-realised sound than a typical solo singer-songwriter record.

The catalyst for her development of her sound was a collaboration with former Temperance Movement guitarist Luke Potashnick, whose input provided a space for the album to take shape...

"I started writing it in January 2014," she explains. "We ended up writing and recording the whole album in his house. It just really naturally fell out... it was weird. I think I'm at my most comfortable writing on my own, but what was great about writing with Luke was that it was very relaxed, it was a place where you could go and experiment. It was really cool to just have one collaborator throughout the whole process. And it was cool to be able to record in a home studio and not have the pressure of a big, fancy London studio. It just felt really free."

SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES

Rather than being in a traditional artist/producer situation, Aplin and Potashnick were allowing ideas to flow freely in both directions, making it a truly collaborative record. "Mostly it would either be me bringing in an unfinished song, either getting him to kind of chime in at the end and help produce it or help with the sounds, or it was the other way around and Luke would come in with a guitar part or riff and we would collaborate that way. It was really nice to be able to do that," she confirms.

For any singer-songwriter, sitting down with an acoustic and trying to write can be a daunting experience, but Aplin found songwriting inspiration from an unlikely source...

"In a small charity shop, I found a tiny little Casio Tone Bank keyboard from the 90s. It just has two octaves, with drum loops on it," she explains. "We ended up recording lots of that as well and writing with >

Above **Aplin's gorgeous 1944 00-17 is outfitted with an LR Baggs M-80 magnetic pickup so she can use it live**

Right **It's not just vintage Martins that Aplin takes with her on tour – this 000-15M is also a faithful live partner**

those loops; I just love finding old, bad instruments! If I was to sit down with a guitar, without anything... I don't know where I'm going to start. But as soon as you put some sort of loop on, I have an idea straight away of what kind of feel I want. Whether it's a rhythm for a riff, or a chord-y thing, or some kind of weird part with a loop pedal or a delay pedal... I'll have that vibe and that feeling when I have a loop."

ACOUSTIC ROOTS

While her growth as an artist has seen Aplin branch out into new sonic territories, she's still very much an acoustic guitar player at heart, and her favourite sidekick is a beautiful mahogany 1944 Martin 00-17 model. It's an instrument that many people would be reluctant to take out on the road, but Gabrielle has taken a more pragmatic approach to her vintage squeeze in recent years.

> *"When a guitar is really old and worn-in and looked after, they just sound amazing. They sound better the older they get"*

"I've got a few vintage guitars, and I've always been scared to tour them in case they get broken," she says. "Then they've ended up just sitting there in the house for a year while I wasn't here, because I was touring and I wasn't playing them. I've started to consider them as something I consume and I take very good care of – and I just hope they don't get broken!"

"And, obviously, I enjoy playing them," she continues. "I had an LR Baggs pickup fitted on the Martin; my plan was to play it live through an amp as well, and use some pedals on that and get some really interesting sounds going; but I think the pickup in the guitar sounds amazing when it's DI'd, so for ease we did that, but I'd definitely like to use it through an amp. When a guitar is really old and worn-in and looked after, they just sound amazing; they sound better the older they get."

When it comes to her playing style, Aplin leans more towards the raw and natural than polished and precise. "I really like seeing an artist who clearly hasn't been taught to play the guitar, playing the guitar. Or someone who has their own way," she confirms. "I'm really inspired by Nick Drake. I love his way of playing. It's really imperfect, and just really unique to him. I also love the way Feist plays guitar, and Cat Power.

"I don't want it to look or sound like it's perfect. It has to be really free and a bit wobbly, as long as it can sit around everything else. I taught myself completely, and I've found my way of playing... I'm constantly trying to make sure I don't know everything! I like that element of not knowing everything perfectly, because in the writing you end up coming out with all these weird chord changes and weird things; I like having that element of discovery when you're playing, and having to guess where you are going, because you never know what's going to come out."

During the sessions for *Light Up The Dark*, Nick Drake's influence came to the fore on one track in particular, which saw Aplin fly solo while drawing on the late folk singer-songwriter's love of non-standard tunings.

"There's a song at the very end of the album, *Don't Break Your Heart On Me* – I wrote that on my vintage Martin and it was the tuning from *Pink Moon* by Nick ›

Martin & Co

"I've always been scared to tour vintage guitars. But then they end up just sitting in the house. So I've started to consider them as something I consume and just hope they don't get broken!"

Drake," she explains. "I'd got the tab book and I really wanted to learn the tuning – how does he do this? And yeah I used that tuning. That song was completely me, without Luke on it, which was really nice. I love buying tab books! But I never read the tab, all I wanted it for was the tunings."

The aforementioned tunings are another aspect of six-string experimentation that Aplin enjoys: "I've started playing a lot more in standard tuning," she reveals, "but I love a weird open tuning, you never know what you're going to get. You just put it into some weird chord and that's an open tuning.

"I don't know where any notes are, I don't know what patterns there are or anything. It's just kind of making it up as you go along, which is pretty cool. But it's really important: record an iPhone voice memo every time!"

STRONG WORDS

As the conversation turns to songwriting, it becomes apparent that *Light Up The Dark* saw Aplin take a fresh approach to the words that she penned as well as the music: "It was quite free. I guess the difference between my first album and this album is that I was able to write it all in the same space and time," she says. "The real big change for me was being happy to write about other people's stories and other things, and draw inspiration from places and travel.

"On my first album, I assumed that because I'm a singer-songwriter I had to write about things that happened to me. When I realised that I didn't have to do that, it was really cool, and it opened loads of doors for me."

Given that Aplin lists the likes of Joni Mitchell, Bob Dylan and Neil Young among her favourite songwriters, it's no surprise that storytelling has begun to enter into her own work, something that's arguably a lost art in the landscape of modern pop. We ask Aplin if she thinks that's true. "No artists nowadays really write about what's going on in the world," she agrees. "There's definitely a very clear palette for what's on the radio and TV. Hopefully, that's something that will start to change and people will start writing about things that are happening now, again – that's why I really like Bob Dylan.

"I think people are scared to do it because of the backlash – you are going to be offending someone somewhere, you are going to be upsetting someone somewhere by speaking out about something. You wouldn't be speaking out unless it was a problem. Because of the internet and the media now, everything travels like fire, so maybe people are scared to do it and are warned not to. But it would only take a few people to do it and it wouldn't be frowned upon anymore. I'd love to be able to write a song that changes the world one day, but it's probably not going to happen!"

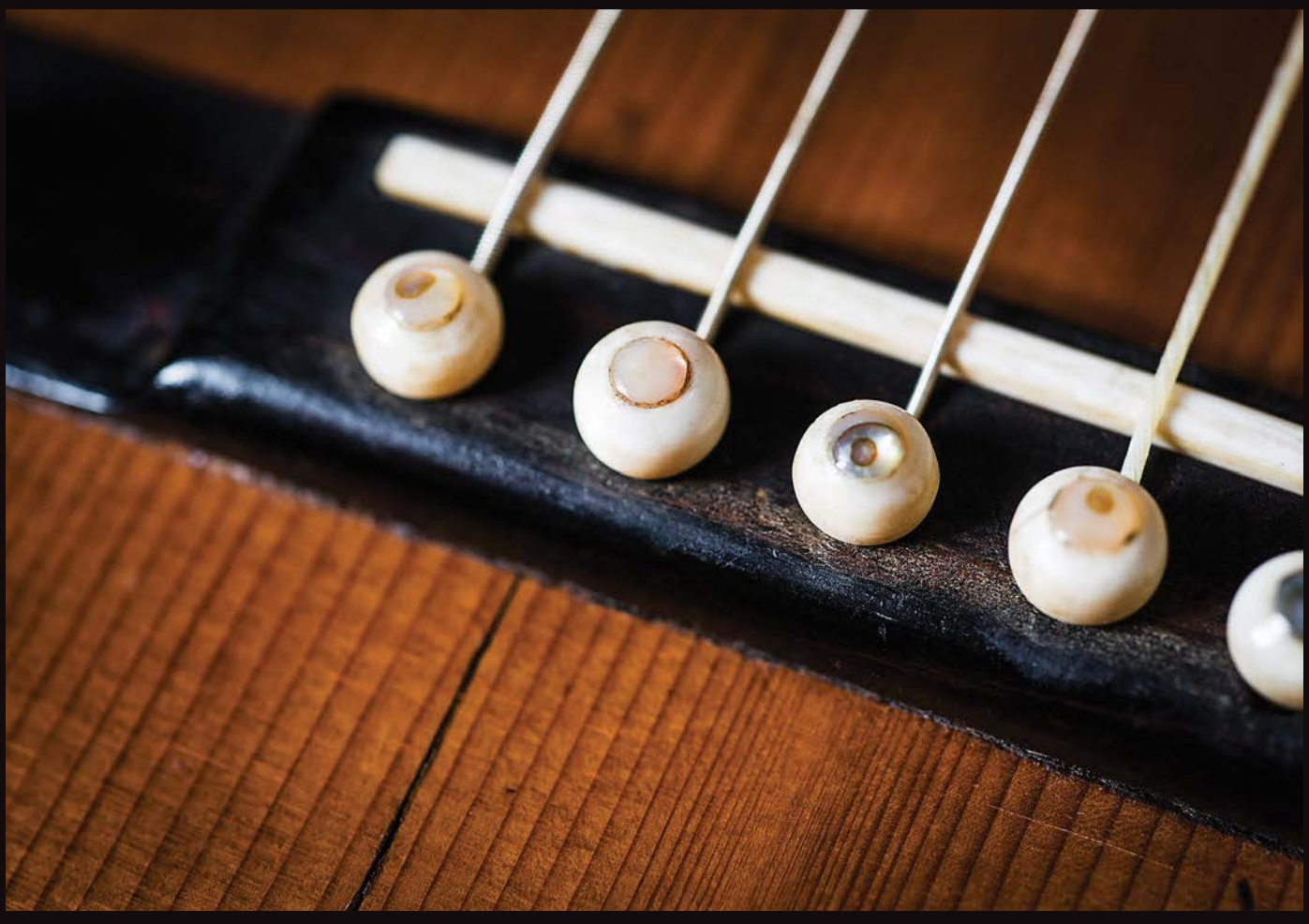
Whether that happens or not, in the mean time she's happy to make do with connecting with her fans in a real and impactful way through her music. "That's the great thing," she enthuses. "Knowing that someone's listening and likes your story because it relates to them."

MUSEUM PIECE

Martin & Schatz X-braced guitar

For Madame Delores Nevares de Goñi (July 1842)

This guitar was produced with a 'Martin & Schatz' label – relating to CF Martin's brief partnership with fellow luthier, Heinrich Schatz. This is the very first Size 1 model produced, and is the earliest X-braced guitar ever documented – something that supports Martin's long-standing claim that the company invented X-bracing. CF Martin made this guitar for Madame Delores Nevares de Goñi – probably the finest professional guitar soloist of her time, whose performances were hugely popular throughout the Americas between the years 1841 and 1892.



Made for Madam DeGone
C. F. MARTIN & SCHATZ,
MANUFACTURERS
Spanish and Vienna warranted
VIOLINS, VIOLONCELLOS, & DOUBLE BASS,
made in the best Italian style.

Natty Dreads

Two new dreadnoughts with unconventional appointments. **HUW PRICE** takes a look at how Martin is riffing on its most popular design

Martin debuted the DCRSG and the D-16E at this year's Winter NAMM Show. While they use the dreadnought shape as a base, closer examination shows they typify Martin's approach to contemporary guitar building, both in the old Nazareth facility, and the newer factory in Navojoa, Mexico... >

The D-16 gets its 'E' from a Fishman Matrix VT system

D-16E

Not so long ago, Dave Grohl called up Martin because he was doing an unplugged show and needed a guitar... but he had a specific request. Years before, The Foo Fighters man had played a Martin D-16BH Beck Hansen signature model featuring a dreadnought-shaped body with the reduced depth of a 000 and he wanted one just like it.

At the time Martin's design team was working on revamping the 16 Series and remembering the Beck model, along with the two other shallow-bodied dreads Martin had made, they ran with the idea for the new D-16. Beck's model had rosewood for the back and sides, but in response to new regulations concerning the export of rosewood, it was decided to explore alternative tone woods.

The classic solid Sitka spruce top was retained, but the back and sides are made from American sycamore in an effort to use native hardwoods. The outer appearance is altered with stain, giving an appearance somewhere between cherry and mahogany but the internal surfaces look more like maple.

More unlikely inspiration for the D-16 came from, of all things, the various car magazines that scattered around the Martin design office. Chief Product Officer Fred Greene, was particularly taken with the brushed aluminium detailing and contrasting orange pinstriped interior trim of a particular Audi model, so they decided to use that theme for the D-16E.

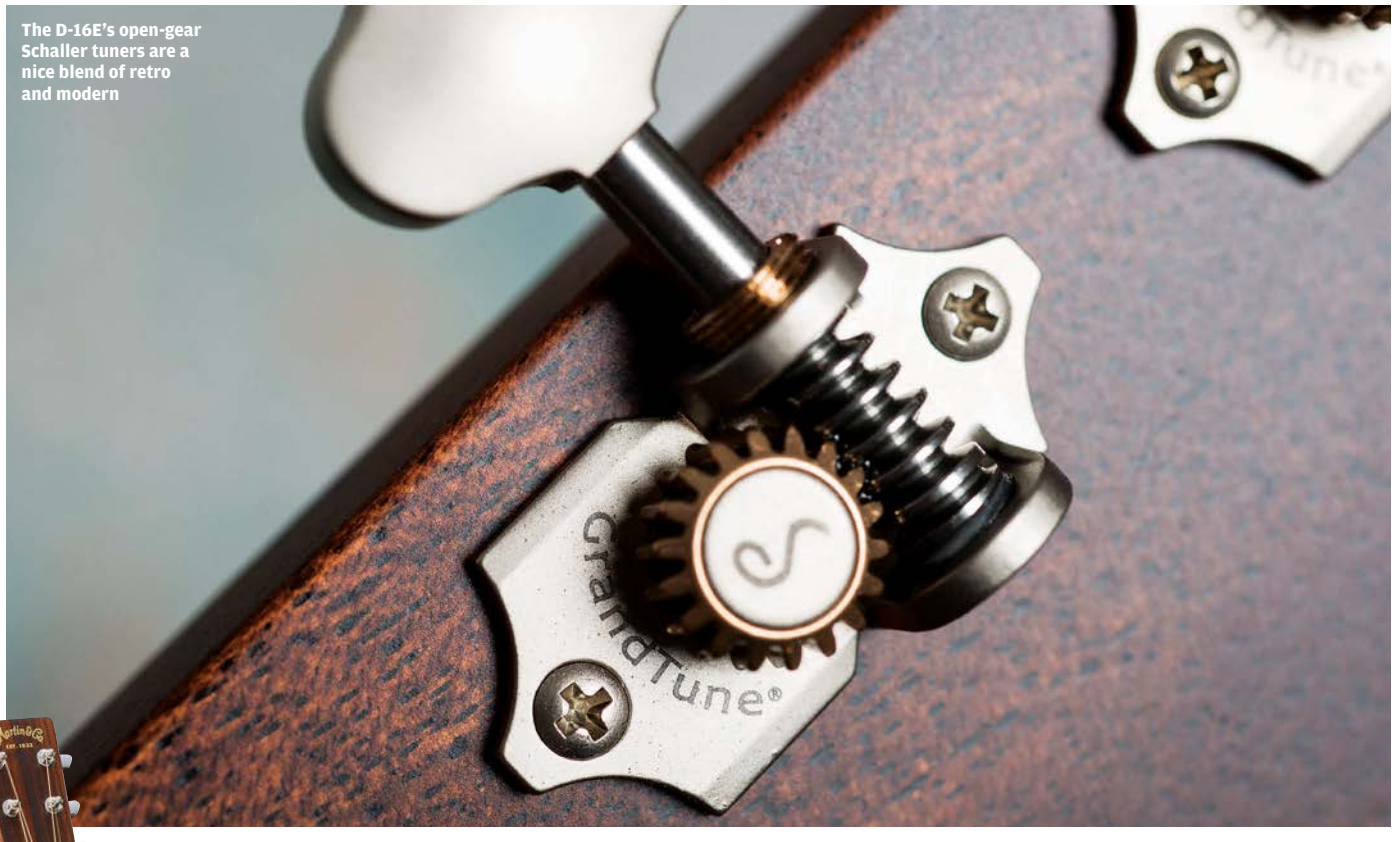
Early attempts were made to bind the guitar with aluminium, but its resistance to sanding and reluctance to bond with wood created issues in a guitar-building context. Eventually the team found a metallic acrylic that proved more suitable and it can be seen binding the front and back of the body, and the ebony fretboard.

Other than that things appear fairly conventional, with an ebony belly bridge and headstock overlay, a snazzy silver metallic peghead logo and bone nut. However the Schaller tuners are a standout feature. They're open geared with butterbean buttons, but the satin pearl finish has a softness that tones with the brushed aluminium look of the binding.

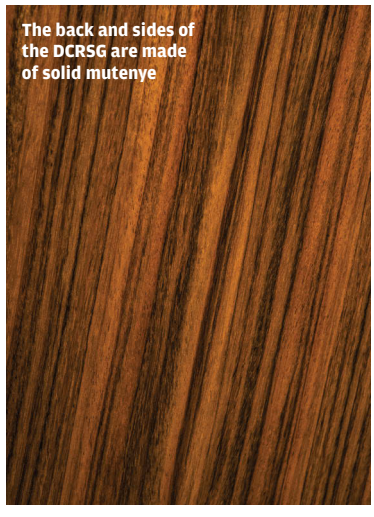
In Use

They say that it's all about that bass, and it's the low end where the D-16E differs most noticeably from the DCRSG that we're also looking at here. It's by no means bass light, but we'd call it controlled rather than attenuated. It's as if reducing body depth has eliminated the boomy thump of a thoroughbred dread but left a more balanced and well-mannered instrument.

The bass is less apparent when you're playing this guitar than when sitting in front of it while someone



The D-16E's open-gear Schaller tuners are a nice blend of retro and modern



The back and sides of the DCRSG are made of solid mutenye

The D-16E's unique silver body binding was inspired by an Audi car

else plays. It retains a lot of power and the midrange scoop is far less noticeable, but it's certainly not a 000 in dreadnought clothing.

In practice, we find the D-16E it to be an excellent bluegrass instrument because the bass notes are so crisply defined and they balance superbly against full chords. Chords are also extremely clear without low-end clutter obscuring notes and voicings. It can even get quite ethereal when you start mixing up fretted notes and open strings, but the plain strings are just a touch lacking in substance when you're fingerpicking. The onboard pickup produces an impressive under-saddle tone that you can blend that with a single acoustic 'model' to create a greater sense of realism. It has a genuinely acoustic quality, however we find the tone to be rather bright through a flat monitoring system – even with the tone rolled back. However that's something that would be easy to remedy and the system is remarkably resistant to feedback.

DCRSG

Coming from Martin's Road Series the DCRSG has a solid and robust feel with a no frills design approach. Rosewood look HPL is used for the peghead overlay and Richlite is used for the fingerboard and bridge. The top is solid Sitka spruce and the back and sides are made from an attractive African timber called mutenye, which is widely used in furniture and flooring.

The body is bound front and back with single-layer white plastic and also features a gloss finish. A hand-rubbed satin finish is preferred for the neck, which is made from an unspecified 'hardwood' and carved to Martin's Performing Artist High Performance Taper profile. The Fishman Sonitone system's volume and tone controls are tucked inside the soundhole.

In Use

Of the two dreadnoughts featured here, the DCRSG is noticeably the heavier. The tone is heavier, too, ›

Martin & Co.
EST. 1833

The reduced body depth of the D-16E makes it feel more like a 000 to play

with that fully rounded dread thump and clearly etched treble. Fundamental frequencies are strong and harmonic overtones are plentiful. Although it's hazardous to draw sweeping conclusions on the basis of one instrument alone, to our ears the tone has some of rosewood's tightness and sheen but it falls a little shy of its harmonic complexity.

The response isn't a fast as the D-16E's and the dynamic range is slightly subdued in comparison. On the one hand this makes it easier to play, especially when you're fingerpicking, but more accomplished players may find the DCRSG a bit less expressive. Even so, it's a powerful rhythm instrument, and the natural compression combines with impressive sustain and easy upper-fret access to make this guitar a very effective instrument for single-note soloing, too.

Although recognisably an under-saddle tone, the pickup system generates a smooth response with natural trebles and high output level. The tone control proves more effective and conventional than that of the D-16E, but with some treble sweetening we notice a slight boxiness creeping into single notes played at the higher reaches of the guitar's neck.

With its white plastic binding, gloss body, satin neck and chrome tuners, the DCRSG brings to mind its mid-priced US rivals. In that sense it makes this a nontraditional guitar for Martin, albeit one that stacks up well against the competition. It might not be the most inspiring instrument we've ever played, but it's solid, stable and roadworthy.

The D-16E, on the other hand, is a guitar that stands out from the crowd, but this does involve certain compromises. Because the metal-look layer is confined to the outer surface of the binding, it's extremely thin. Consequently, the factory guys have been unable to soften the transition from fingerboard binding to neck wood in the usual way for fear of sanding through to the darker inner material. This means that, compared with the DCRSG, the neck has a more pronounced shoulder giving the neck a wide and flat D profile that isn't unpleasant, but just not quite as refined as Martin's usual modern profiles.

If you're someone who likes dreadnought tone, but not the traditional body dimensions, you may well think the neck is worth getting used to, as the D-16E's slimmer body depth offers a great balance of tone and playability.

KEY FEATURES

Martin D-16E

- **PRICE** £2,299
- **DESCRIPTION** All-solid electro-acoustic guitar. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Solid Sitka spruce top, solid American sycamore and sides, hardwood neck, ebony fingerboard and bridge, Tusq bridge pins, bone nut and compensated Tusq saddle
- **HARDWARE** Schaller open-gear tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Fishman Matrix VT Enhance NT2
- **LEFT HANDERS** Yes
- **FINISH** Hand-rubbed ubbed natural satin with gloss top
- **SCALE LENGTH** 645mm/25.4"
- **NECK WIDTH** 44mm at nut, 53.5mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 19mm at first fret, 22mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 38mm at nut, 55mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 4.25lbs/1.93kg
- **CONTACT** www.martinguitar.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Comfortable body depth
+ Balanced and boom-free tone
+ Outstanding tuners
+ Unique styling
+ Impressive pickup system

– Slightly boxy neck profile

If you can work with the looks and the neck profile, this is a unique take on the classic Martin concept

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Martin DCRSG

- **PRICE** £1,450
- **DESCRIPTION** All-solid electro-acoustic guita. Made in Mexico
- **BUILD** Solid Sitka spruce top, solid mutenye back and sides, hardwood neck, Richlite fingerboard and bridge, plastic bridge pins, Corian nut and compensated Tusq saddle
- **HARDWARE** Chrome die-cast tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Fishman Sonitone
- **LEFT HANDERS** Yes
- **FINISH** Hand-rubbed satin neck with gloss body
- **SCALE LENGTH** 645mm/25.4"
- **NECK WIDTH** 44mm at nut, 54mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 21mm at first fret, 22mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 39mm at nut, 55mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 4.92lbs/2.23kg

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Sold build
+ Comfortable neck profile
+ Decent pickup system

– Feels a bit heavy and overbuilt
– Slightly generic unplugged tone

It's not going to go down as an all-time classic, but this is a dependable, stable and road-ready guitar with an impressive pickup system

7/10

Drawing On History

Words: **Huw Price**

Dick Boak has been a Martin employee for over four decades, and is widely recognised as a leading authority on the history of the company. Here, he gives us his perspective...

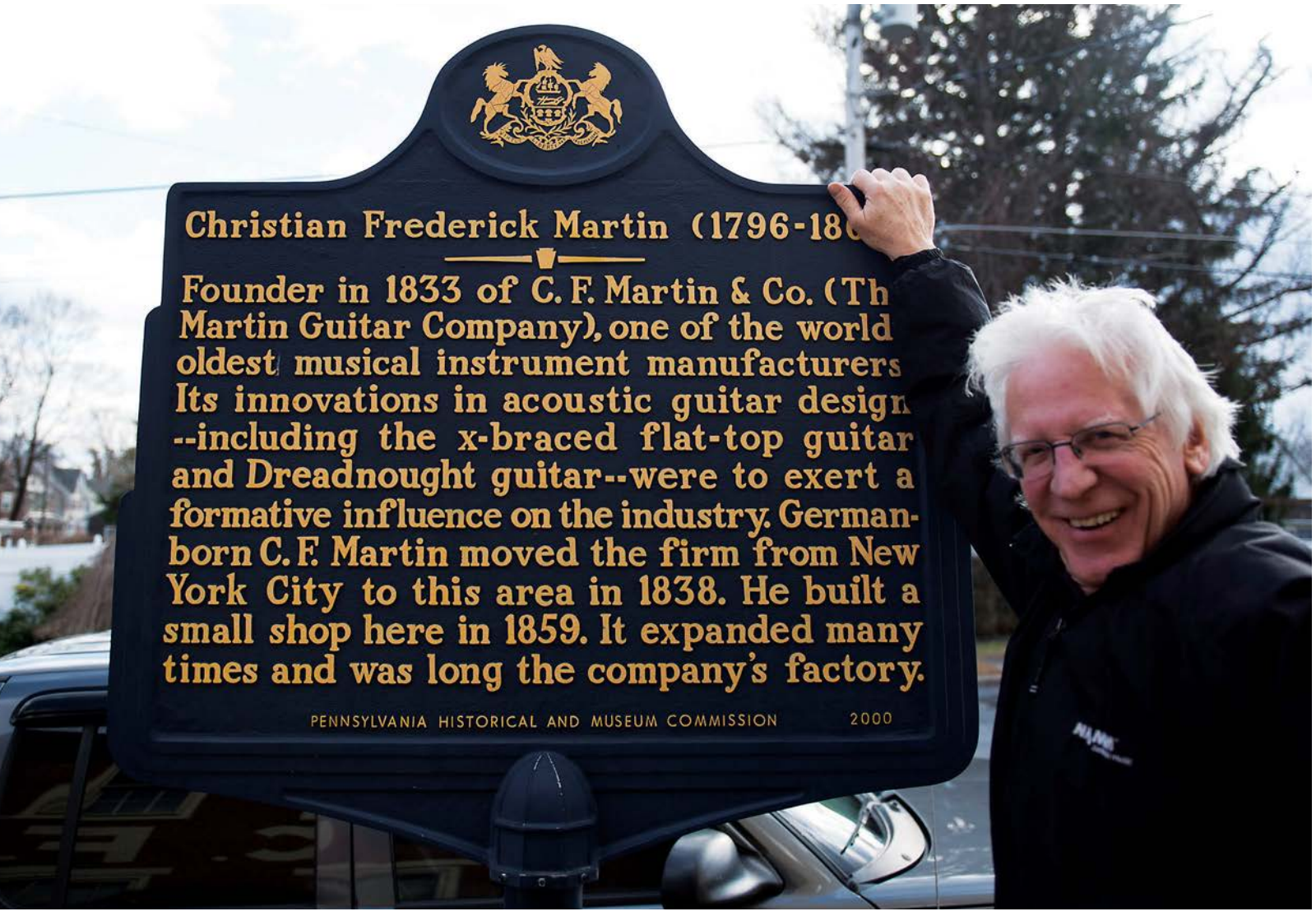
Since joining Martin as a design draftsman over 40 years ago, Dick Boak has taken on the roles of Director Of Artist Relations, official company historian and more besides. He has also authored several books on Martin, is credited as one of the driving forces behind Martin's Artist Signature Series, and he has even built guitars of his own along the way. These days Dick serves as custodian of the company's hugely impressive archives, and was *G&B*'s guide during our visit to the Martin Museum at the firm's Pennsylvania headquarters. We chatted with Dick about the company's long and prestigious history, and the key role he's played in preserving it...

Martin made its two millionth guitar this year. Does that mean that Martin has made more acoustics than anybody else?
"I don't have the figures, but I doubt it. Given the amount of inexpensive products coming out of China, let alone companies such as Harmony out of Chicago, and Gibson or Fender. They have a business that is tremendously different from us, and I think it's dangerous for Martin to measure itself against other companies in sheer numbers. It's better we measure ourselves on the tone of the guitars we produce. I think it's great to celebrate milestones like this when our speedometer clicks over in the form of a commemorative guitar or special edition, but the real measure of Martin is the sheer quality of the product, which exceeds anything I see in the marketplace."

But given that there's been just 12 years between Martin's one- and two-millionth guitars, you must be making more guitars than ever before?
"Pretty much, yes. The questions we need to ask ourselves are where do the guitars go and is the sheer number of guitars that the entire industry is currently making sustainable?"

So have you actually made two million guitars, or is it two million instruments?
"Well, the recent ukuleles are mixed into that number, mandolins are not – we're actually celebrating the two-millionth serial number, which excludes a great portion of the Mexican production as well as all of the Backpackers. So, if you added in all of the instruments that aren't included in our serial number system, it would be way more than two million."

To what extent has Martin retained records on high-end guitars, particularly during the 19th and early 20th centuries?
"Compared to the importance that other companies have placed on their history, Martin has saved an unbelievable amount of information. I've had a lot of different jobs here but my job currently is running the museum and archives. Over the last decade we have scanned more than 400,000 documents from the archive, which date back to before 1833. These include letters, correspondence and journals, many of them written in German, and some cover the relocation from New York to Nazareth. There are orders, logbooks, time books and just a ›



Above **Dick poses in front of a sign outside the North St factory in Nazareth that recognises the impact of CF Martin Sr**

Right **Dick was a woodworking teacher before he joined Martin back in 1976**

remarkable amount of information that the company has saved over the years.

"What we've tried to achieve is firstly to preserve all of that, then capture it digitally and expand upon it. Over the last few years we've collaborated with other archives, shared materials and, through diligent purchases, expanded our collection of guitars, as well as our incredible collection of photographs of people who have played Martins from the dawn of photography. I think the Martin archives and collection is now one of the most significant in the world. It really tells a story."

Would you say it goes beyond a company archive and has broader significance for social history?

"Absolutely. You know the guitar, and music in general, weaves its way through American and world culture. Martin is inextricable from that, as is proven in at least two books – one being Philip F Gura's *CF Martin & His Guitars* and the other being a book that accompanied The Metropolitan Museum Of Art Martin exhibition called *Inventing The American Guitar*."

> *"The guitar, and music in general, weaves its way through American and world culture. Martin is inextricable from that"*

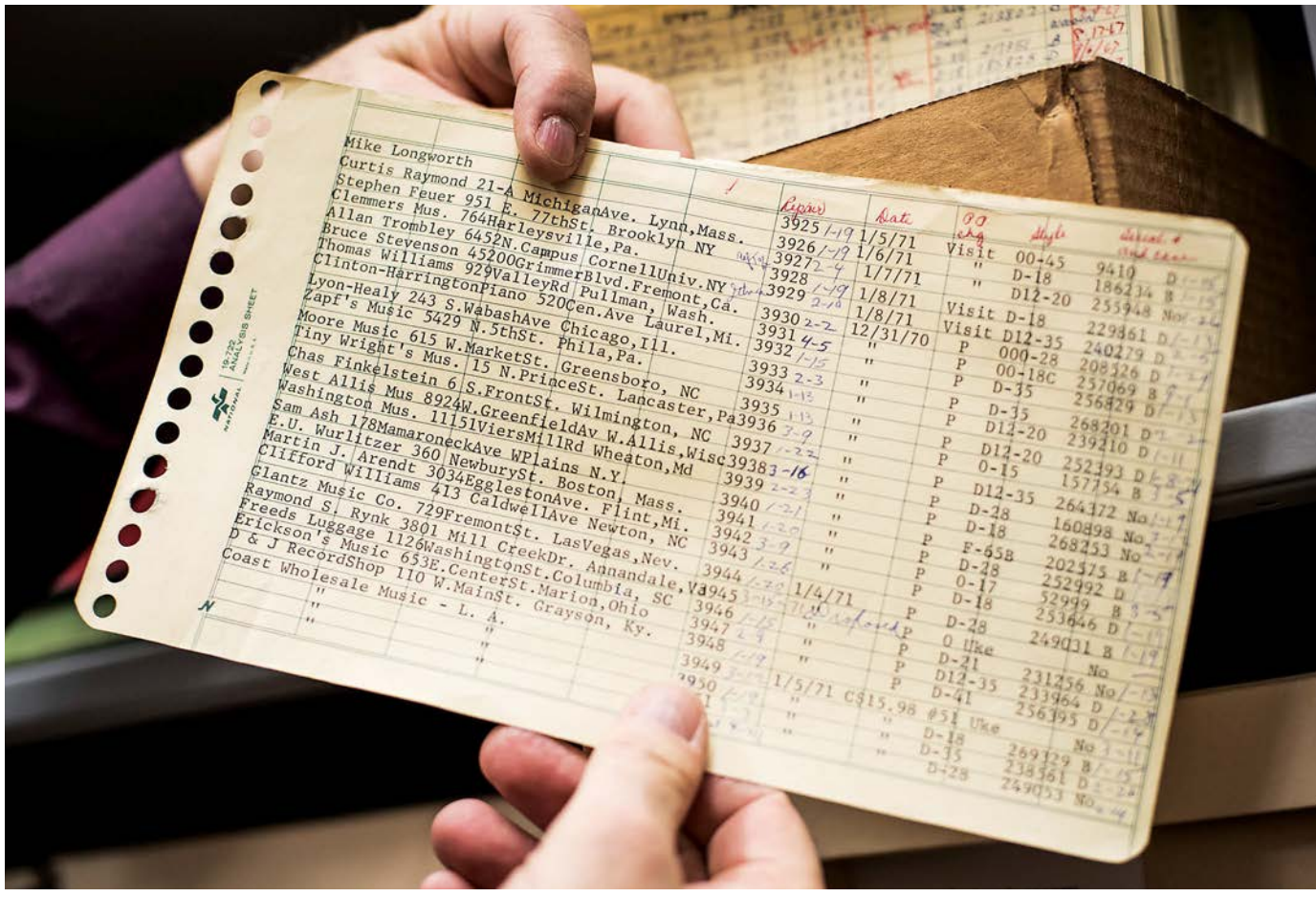
"Those two books really delineate how business was conducted in colonial America. More than just guitars, it's about how everything worked here – from canals and railroad lines to stagecoaches, how things were shipped and paid for, distribution, the postal system and communication. It's all captured – even the bartering of guitars for supplies and cases of wine! Anywhere you scratch in the archives opens up a ton of extra information."

Does the archive contain records on employees that might help family history researchers?

"Yes, I get a lot of phone calls from families of former employees. Maybe the grandson of someone who worked here in 1929, and they want to know if we have anything about them, like a record of their employment. So about five years ago I started another tangent of the archive that is just information about our employees.

"Our employee records go right back to the 1830s, and we have records of wage payments that CF Martin made to specific employees. These can be traced all the way up to the keeping of actual time books, which date from the 1890s to the 1920s. There you can see exactly how many hours a person worked and how much they were paid. I've tried to create a database of the names of everybody who has ever worked here, organised alphabetically, along with the specific years they were employed and their job titles." ›

"The interesting part is that once an instrument becomes part of our collection, its value would typically increase, because we tend to collect really great examples of our historic guitars"



Surely there must be people working there now, whose families have worked at Martin for generations?
"Yes, for instance there's a woman in the back who is a neck fitter and her name is Susan. Her grandfather Earl worked here for 30 or 40 years and was a pretty significant employee here. For a time he had the exact same job that Susan does."

How do you go about acquiring new guitars for the museum's collection?
"When the museum first opened at the end of 2005, and I started to install all the guitars from the collection that we had into new cases in the visitor centre, the idea was that we wanted to be able to tell the Martin story through the guitars of each time period. So the museum is divided up into chronological cases and there's no question that from 1950 on we had a very nice collection.

"However we had weaknesses and holes in the collection and we were thankful that business was really good and that Chris Martin was committed to making investments in instruments for the museum. We have plugged and filled almost every hole that you could conceivably imagine, so not only do we have a complete representation of just about every time period, we also have backups going two or three instruments deep.

"I think we're now in a hiatus, so we're not really trying to collect more, but if something really interesting or historic comes our way we might consider a purchase, but for the most part we have all we need. The interesting thing is that once an instrument becomes part of our collection, its value would typically increase. It's because we tend to collect really great examples of our historic guitars."

Above Martin has kept meticulous records of orders, repairs and correspondence from the company's long history

Left The Martin archive doesn't just contain musical memorabilia – there are also some more esoteric items...

Do some of the older examples need restoration to make them playable or to stabilise their condition?
"We like instruments that are playable and that we can show off for the sheer tone that they have, so yes there are cases where a little bit of work needs to be done. For example we bought the very first serial number D-28 and some really bad refinishing work had been done to it. Normally we wouldn't want to be doing refinishing but with that guitar it was so bad that we wanted to reverse that and get it back into shape.

"We also had an Eric Clapton Limited Edition that actually fell in the museum and got a little bit damaged, so there was some repair work there. Every now and then when we purchase an instrument, it will be missing a bridge or will have loose braces so we'll put the work into those as needed but for the most part not much is necessary." >

Are there ever instances where the Martin records document the original owners of guitars?
"Yes, and sometimes it's correspondence. For example we have letters from Jimmy Rogers, Mother Maybelle Carter and Gene Autry in our files. Some letters are expressing the desire to purchase an instrument or the need to send something back for repair work or whatever. We also have kept warranty records that go back pretty far and in the ledger books themselves it will often say who the guitar was sold to.

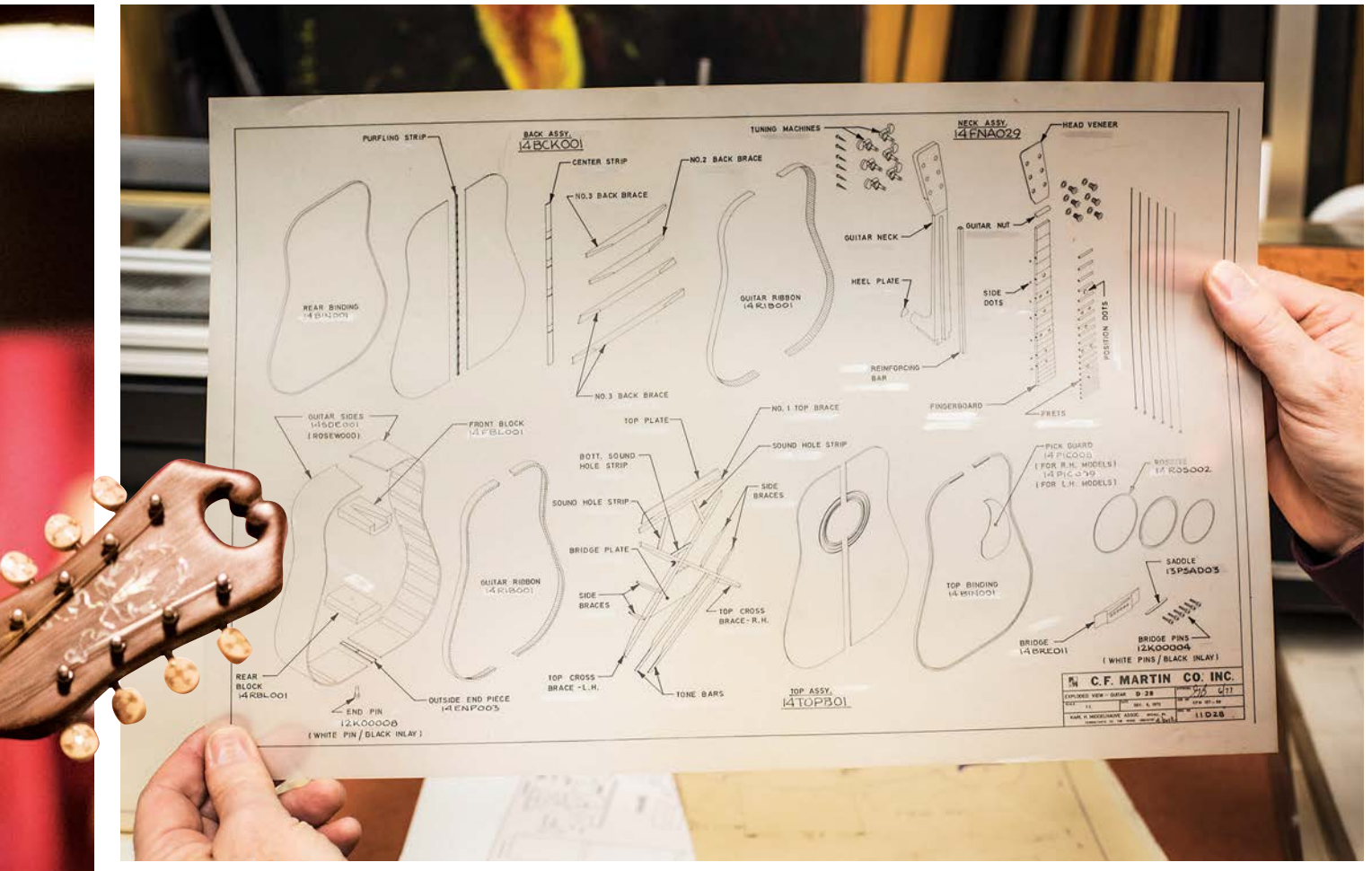
"We have many different vehicles for identifying who owned specific instruments. Naturally we're interested in famous players, so if we find out a guitar was owned by Elvis Presley, Paul McCartney or Neil Young for instance, we like to record that information in the historic logbooks as well as digitally in our files."

Does the collection include any instruments CF Martin made in Europe prior to emigrating to America?
"We do have an instrument from the Stauffer company in Vienna, and that instrument was made in 1820. So it most likely would have been worked on at a time when CF Martin Senior was under the employ of Stauffer. Besides that one instrument, the collection actually begins from the time that he arrived in the United States in 1833. He arrived in November and our earliest guitar, and perhaps the oldest Martin guitar in existence, dates to early 1834 and it was made by CF Martin himself in New York City.

"It has the Stauffer-style headstock, and we have quite a few examples from the 1830s and into the 1840s >

"There's a woman in the back who is a neck fitter and her name is Susan. Her grandfather, Earl, worked here for 30 or 40 years and for a time he had the exact same job that Susan does"

Left In addition to instruments and documents, the archive also has a collection of memorabilia associated with Martin artists



Left In addition to guitars, the museum also features many mandolins, which were a key part of Martin's success at the turn of the century

Above There are over 400,000 documents in the archive, including this exploded diagram of a D-28

with that headstock style. It gradually got phased out, mostly because of the difficulty in securing the tuning machines for it from Germany. It took six months to place the order, send it across to Germany, and then have the tuners come over the America by boat. Waiting six months for parts was simply not a good option for a manufacturer!"

It's extraordinary that such a historic and sizeable company can still be owned and run by the same family after almost two hundred years.

"Chris Martin has gone above and beyond, not only to ensure the family ownership, but to put it all back in one piece. He has purchased back the majority of the company stock. One of the dangers that family owned businesses go through is a fracturing or disintegration of the ownership of the company to many different family members. Fortunately that has not been a huge problem for Martin."

"Chris Martin's grandfather looked at the instruments that T'd made and said 'Tell that kid to apply for a job'"

You're planning to retire soon but you've been with Martin for most of your career. How did you start?

"From a very young age I was always interested in woodworking as well as art, music and creativity in general. After being a California hippy living on a commune, I came back to this area and got a job as an art teacher in New Jersey. Driving to work from my hometown, which is just south of here in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, I had to go right through Nazareth and I saw a billboard for Martin Guitars.

"I had been trying to build guitars on a very amateur level so I stopped in, took a tour and I was flabbergasted by the beautiful woods and the incredible process of guitar making. I asked whether or not there was a dumpster containing scraps so they sent me around the side of the building and I hit the jackpot. There were beautiful pieces of rosewood and ebony, spruce and mahogany. I brought my car around and filled it up.

"I began using those materials in my teaching of woodworking and I also started to get pretty good pieces because I came back to the dumpster probably close to five hundred times over the course of my four years of teaching

"One day the foreman asked me what I did with all the wood and I showed him some examples of my woodworking as well as a couple of instruments I had made. He asked permission to show them around the shop and he took two of my guitars and ran into Chris Martin's grandfather. He said, 'Look what the kid made', and Mr Martin looked at the instruments then said, 'Tell that kid to apply for a job'."

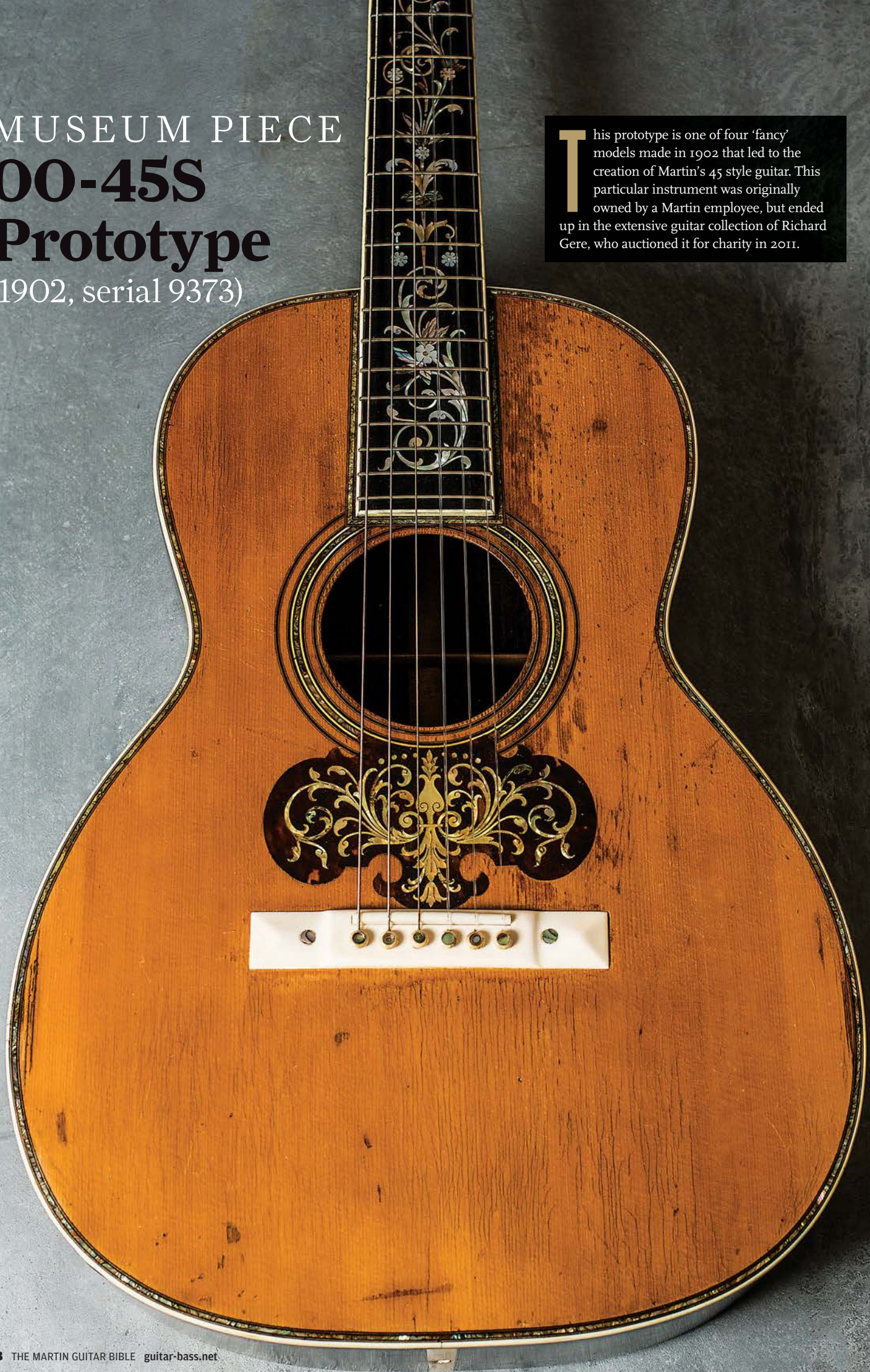
"So I brushed off all the dust from the dumpster, went back around the front of the building and applied for a job. I didn't think that I'd be qualified for anything, but the job that was open fitted my qualifications perfectly. It was for a design draftsman and I had been doing that for more than a decade before teaching it. The timing was perfect back in 1976, but I probably would have done the job for free!"

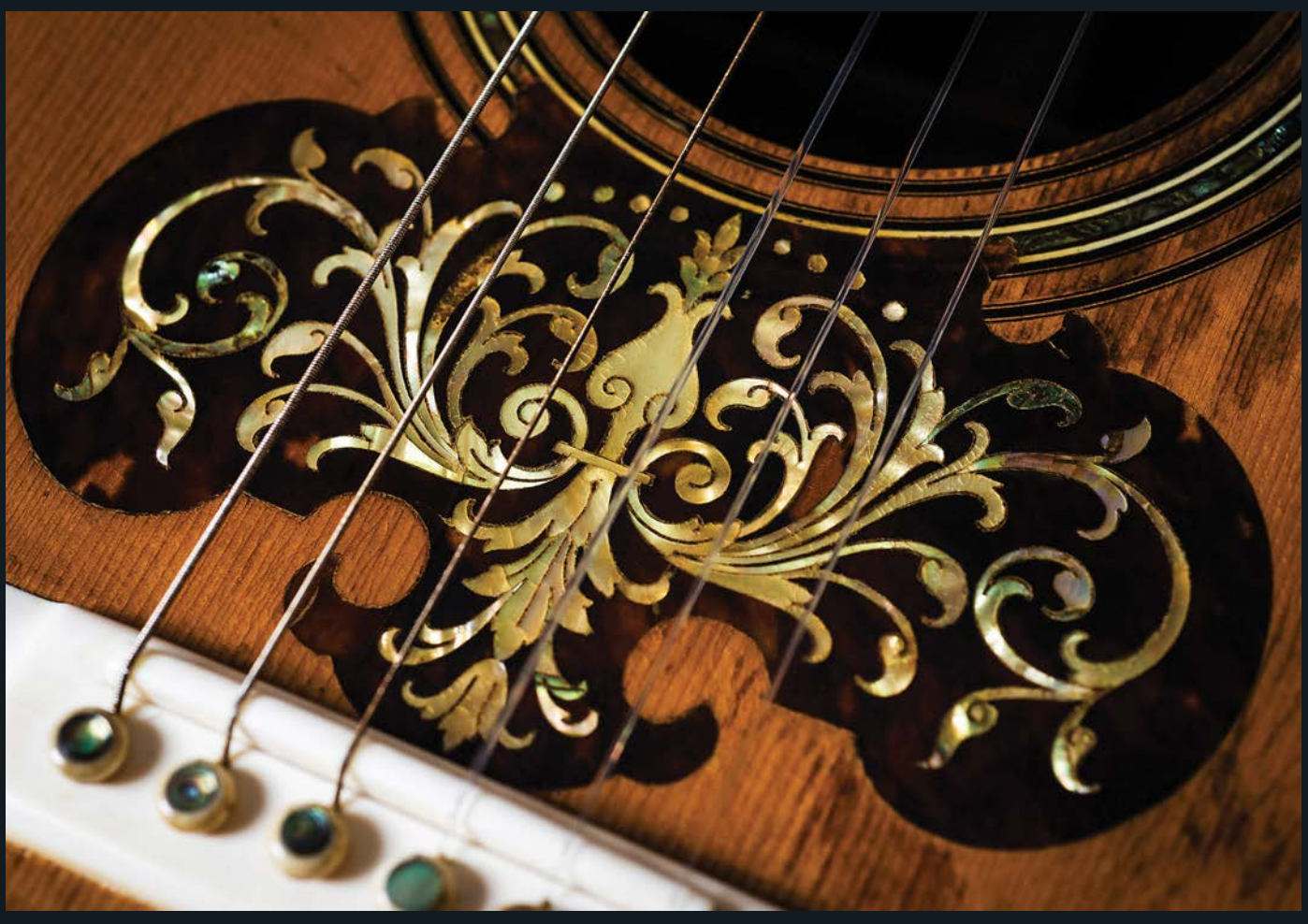
MUSEUM PIECE

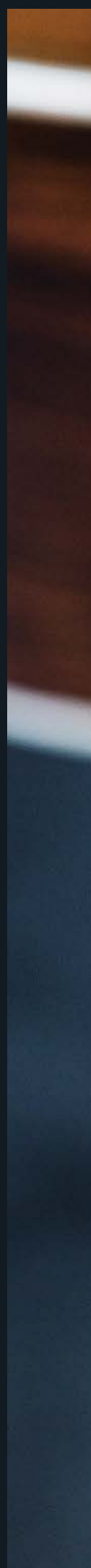
00-45S Prototype

(1902, serial 9373)

This prototype is one of four 'fancy' models made in 1902 that led to the creation of Martin's 45 style guitar. This particular instrument was originally owned by a Martin employee, but ended up in the extensive guitar collection of Richard Gere, who auctioned it for charity in 2011.







Martin&Co.
EST. 1833
00LX1AE

Martin OOLX1AE

With its unusual mix of neck and body styles and a plethora of nontraditional materials, the OOLX1AE exemplifies the new breed of Martin. **HUW PRICE** finds out if it still sounds like one...

The OOLX1AE might look like a normal Martin guitar at first glance, but on closer inspection, it bears little resemblance to your granddaddy's acoustic. In fact, the only traditional materials used in its construction are solid spruce for the top and braces, and Spanish cedar for the kerfing. The back and sides might look like mahogany, but they're made of what Martin calls High Pressure Laminate (HPL). If you look inside the guitar, you'll notice that the bare HPL looks similar to the gluing surface of Formica – it's basically the same thing.

It's a similar story with the bridge and fingerboard, which are both made from another resin-infused paper-based composite called Richlite. Even on close inspection it looks not unlike high-quality ebony.

Martin's multi-ply birch laminate necks have a distinctive but attractive look about them, and this is the best one we've seen. It's stained a lovely russet brown and the way the layers are revealed by the heel carve is reminiscent to a Viking ship's prow. It also feels as good as it looks, due to Martin's hand-rubbed satin finish.

HPL reappears for the peghead overlay, but this time with a rosewood graphic. We also see a polished Corian nut, a compensated Tusq saddle and white plastic bridge pins. Black and white binding material is used for the rosette and while the body is otherwise unbound, the joins on the back and sides are cut at an angle to create a faux binding effect by revealing the inner layers.

There are no decorative frills, but the OOLX1AE is very neatly constructed and finished. The stripped-down and austere aesthetic also creates a look

The body is unbound, but we do get some subtle decoration around the soundhole

The bridge and fingerboard look like ebony, but are in fact man-made Richlite

The battery access and jack plug are conveniently located in the same place

and feel that is quintessentially Martin. There's also a Fishman Sonitone pickup system with volume and tone controls lurking under the soundhole and an output jack/battery compartment combo affixed to the lower bout.

In Use

Impressively, there is nothing about the tone here that betrays the fact that comparatively little of it is made from wood, and indeed it sounds every inch a Martin. The voicing is bright and jangly with even string-to string response. Sustain impresses, too, and overall you get a strong flavour of the airy and wispy sound that many associate with small- and medium-sized Martins.

It's a tad bass light, even for a guitar of its size, but is still balanced. The top responds quickly, even with a light touch, and the tone retains definition under hard strumming and delicate picking across the frequency range. As with many laminated back and sides guitars there's a sense that the top produces the lion's share of the sound and the tone is a bit 2D, but it's clearly not a HPL-specific issue.

As for the pickup system, it's high-output, low noise and sounds very decent indeed. The OOLX1AE also gets nice and loud before feedback becomes an issue. The nontraditional materials shouldn't put you off – listen with closed eyes and an open mind and you'll find that this is indeed bona fide Martin electro-acoustic at a fairly affordable price.

KEY FEATURES

OOLX1AE

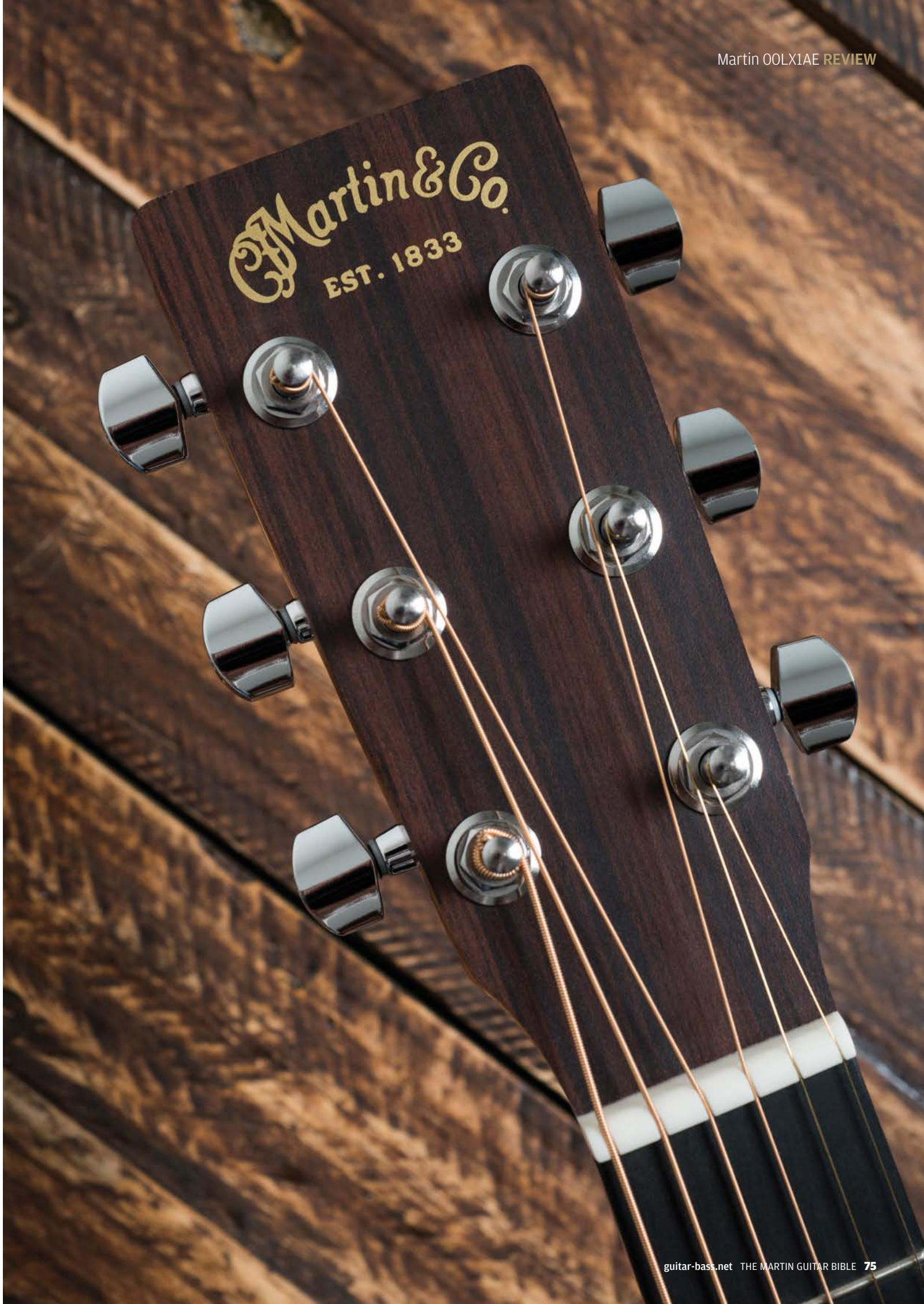
- **PRICE** £649
- **DESCRIPTION** Part-solid, part-synthetic electro-acoustic guitar. Made in Mexico
- **BUILD** Solid sitka spruce top, HPL back and sides, birch laminate neck, Richlite fingerboard and bridge, plastic bridge pins, Corian nut and compensated Tusq saddle
- **HARDWARE** Chrome die-cast tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Fishman Sonitone
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes
- **FINISH** hand rubbed natural satin
- **SCALE LENGTH** 632mm/24.9"
- **NECK WIDTH** 44mm at nut, 54mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 20mm at first fret, 22mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 39mm at nut, 55mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 4.51lbs/2.05kg
- **CONTACT** www.martinguitar.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Traditional look and feel
+ Lively response, with a clear and ringing tone
+ Equally impressive plugged in

- Slightly brash and bass-light
- No case or gigbag

A very modern Martin that retains the classic look and feel established in Nazareth, with rugged, road-worthy build quality and an impressive amplified tone

8/10

Martin & Co.
EST. 1833

C F MARTIN

Different Designs

Words: **Huw Price**

Martin's Director of Design, Tim Teel, on walking the tightrope between tradition and technology, and some very special guitars...

Martin Guitars is a family affair for Tim Teel and since his grandfather first helped him to get through the door, his rise through the company has been impressive. Most recently, Tim worked on Martin's stunning one-off 2 Millionth Guitar (which you can see in all its glory opposite), and the limited edition D-200 Deluxe that celebrates that milestone. But it's not all eye-grabbing show pieces – Teel is also responsible for incorporating the most cutting-edge materials and modern production methods at this most traditional of guitar manufacturers. Here, he describes some of those recent innovations and provides tantalising clues about what the company has in the pipeline.

Was it always your ambition to follow in your grandfather's footsteps by working for Martin?

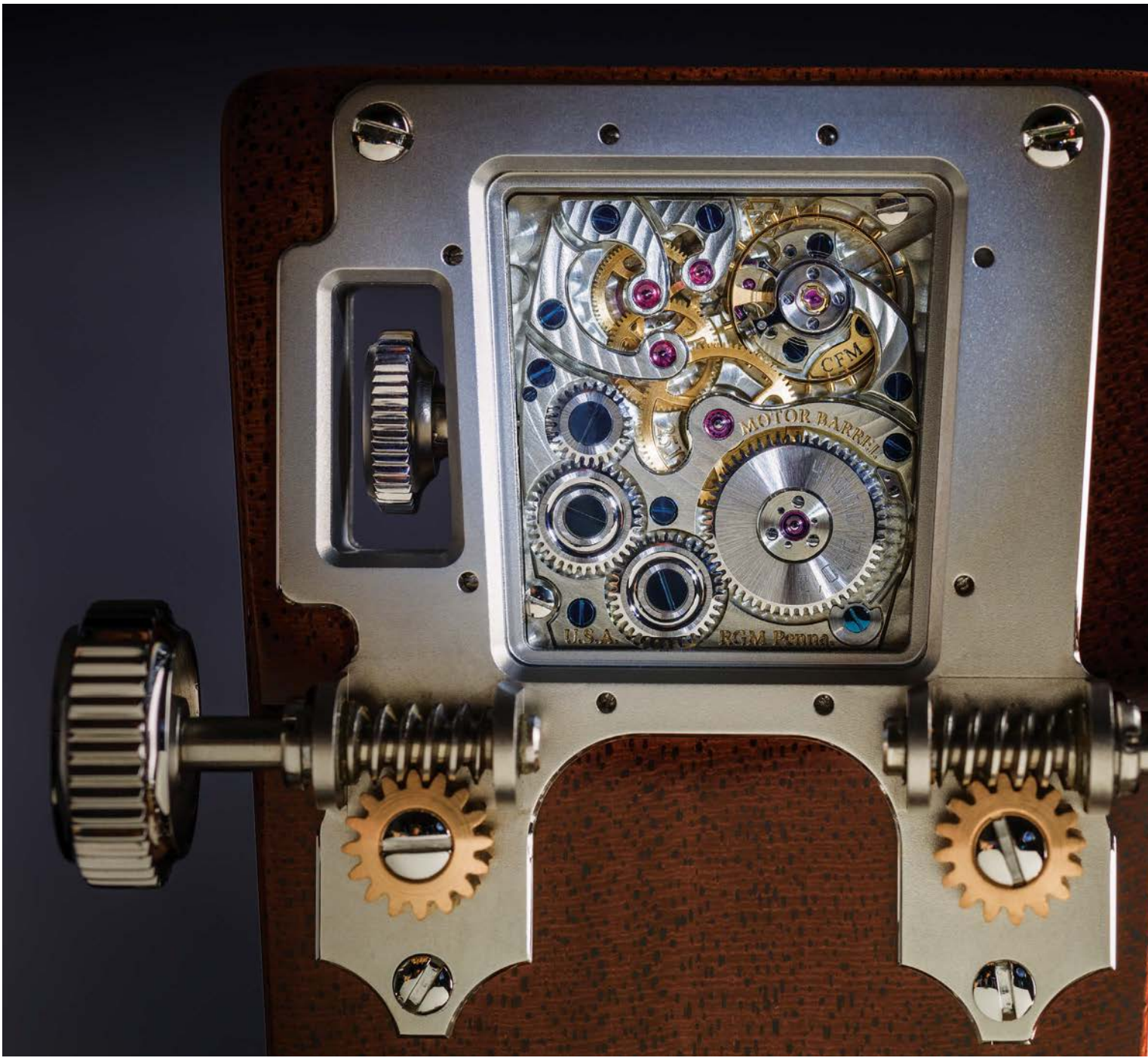
"Actually yes and he started working here in 1966, the year I was born. I grew up right across the street from him, so every day as I child I'd go over and he'd be playing his guitar, banjo or fiddle. Then when I was in my teens he started messing around in his basement workshop making some guitars and we had some fun with that. So I made my first instrument with him when I was about 13 years old.

"In that time period Martin was really slow getting out production orders, so there was no real hope that I'd even be able to get in the door. So I had another career lined up for when I left high school and after a year working in construction Martin announced they were looking for people to start working on guitar strings.

"Martin had bought the Darco string company back in the 70s, and they were bringing the strings in from Long Island, but around 1985 they decided to relocate the string manufacturing to Nazareth. My grandfather said, 'If you're interested, now's the time to get your foot in the door'.

"So that's what I did, and I started working on guitar strings and learning how to fix the machines. Then after the first year they had some people retire and they needed help on the guitar production side so my first production job was neck fitting and I did that for a couple of years."

Opposite The 2 Millionth Martin is a priceless one-off acoustic with extraordinary inlay work



Above Mounted into the headstock of the 2 Millionth Martin is a working watch created by Roland G Murphy of RGM

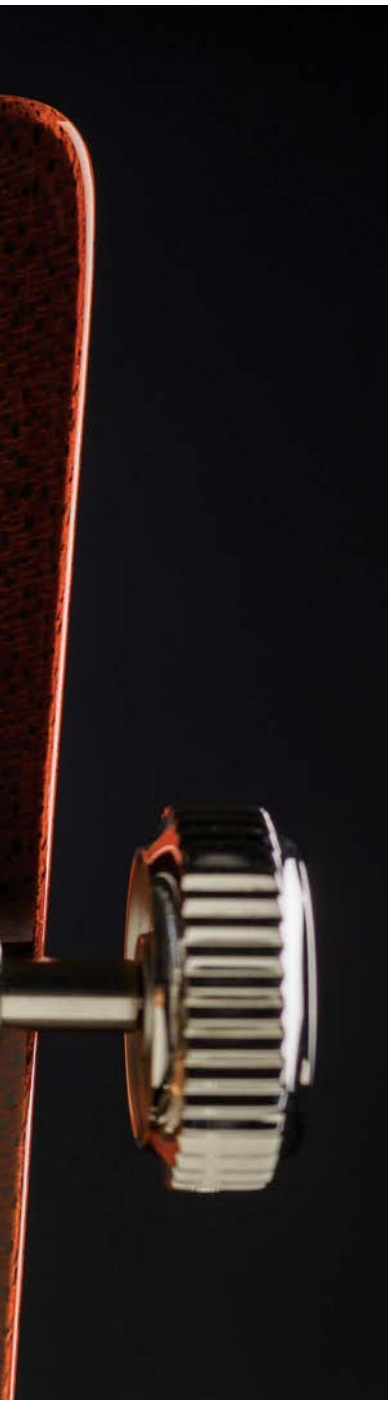
Talk about being thrown in the deep end!
"Well yes! But they told me they did that because they knew I had experience from working with my grandfather. It was the hardest thing I ever had to learn because it's one thing goofing around in the basement and another making a very precise neck joint."

Was it the case that once you were in, the career opportunities opened up?
"Yes, especially back in those days, because Martin had been in a very odd way since the mid-1970s. From the early 60s Martin had been producing a lot of instruments and employed a lot of people, then in the mid-70s they had a worker's strike that lasted nine months and at the same time music tastes had changed with disco and keyboards coming on strong.

"Acoustic guitars fell out of favour during that period and Martin started making electric guitars, but that didn't work out too well. Things were at their lowest point by the mid-80s, which is why they brought string manufacturing in house. As I recall we were doing about 24 guitars per day when I was in the neck fitting area, and ever since *Eric Clapton Unplugged* on MTV it has been steadily going uphill – until this year."

How much involvement did you have in the design of the 2 Millionth Martin and the D-200 Deluxe?
"It was a collaborative effort. Scott Sasser and myself began thinking about what we'd like to see or do and we enlisted the help of Robert Goetzl to illustrate some designs. Then we worked with Roland Murphy of RGM Watches to make sure the watch parts were accurately depicted on the guitars.

"On the 2 Millionth we did a huge amount of epoxy potting, which is a technique we developed for other guitars. It was a challenge to get the epoxy smooth and



"We try to draw inspiration from a lot of the things that we like, such as watches, cars and vintage shotguns"

clear over such a wide area. We would place cups containing the epoxy in a vacuum to de-gas the mixture and remove any air bubbles before pouring it."

Martin is revered as a builder of traditional instruments, so how does a designer like yourself push things forwards while respecting the legacy?
"It's walking a fine line, because you want to investigate new materials and designs, but the reason many people love Martins is the iconic guitars. The pinnacle came in the 1930s and 1940s, and so today we go back and replicate those guitars for our Authentic Series. But we also recognise modern tastes and so we push forward with things like the new 16 Series, using different colours, woods and that sort of thing.

"Also with the 2 Millionth and the D-200, we do see opportunities to engage in a design challenge for ourselves in pulling in other elements and themes. We try to draw inspiration from a lot of the things we like, such as watches, cars and vintage shotguns. We get very passionate about those things and they can filter through into the design of a new product."

Of all your design ideas, which are you most proud of?
"Oh wow, they're really like your children so it's hard to pick just one. Recently I'd say the D-200 and the 2 Millionth just for the challenge of it. I was involved on the 1 Millionth and the D-100, but we enlisted Larry Robinson to do all the artwork. For this one we had to work with the watchmaker and Stewart MacDonald with Waverly to make the watch fit into the headstock. It was just one aspect but it took a considerable amount of time to figure out and get right.

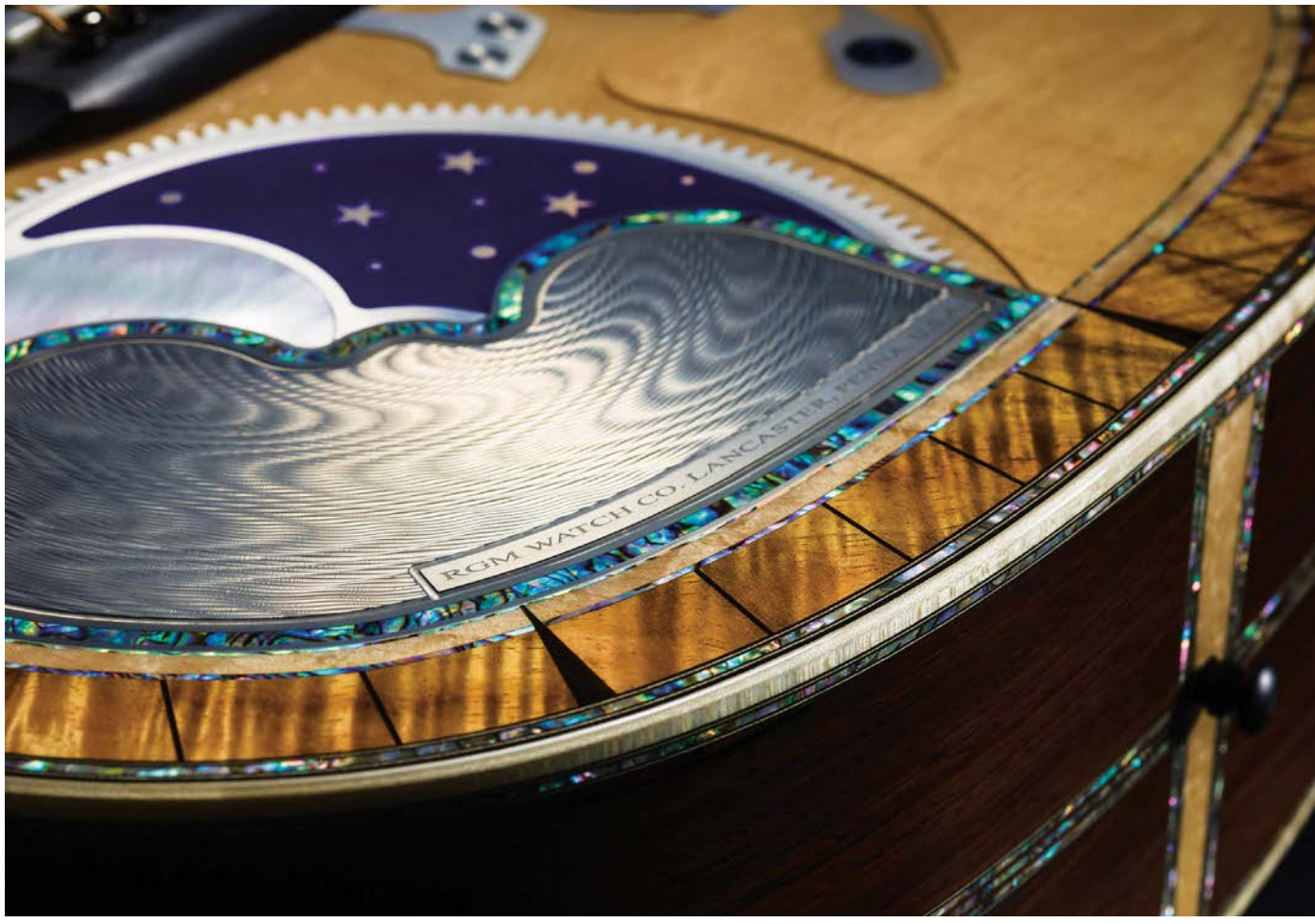
"Doing the X Series was an exercise in finding a material that could be used to cut down on time for finishing and it started here in Nazareth. The High

Above top **Waverly created custom watch gear tuners for the 2 Millionth guitar**

Above left **The top of the guitar is made of highly figured bearclaw Engelmann spruce**

Above right **The watch motif includes decorative gears and guilloché inlaid into the guitar's body**

The D-200 Deluxe has been produced to commemorate Martin making 2 million guitars, and will set you back a whopping $149,999



Pressure Laminate used for the back and sides is a durable material. Likewise another favourite is the Authentic line. We started with Vintage, then Golden Era and finally made the ultimate sacrifices to replicate, as closely as possible, classic guitars from the eras that are so popular."

Are there any interesting innovations in the pipeline?
"Many people regard the Martin tone as being the pinnacle but my goal is to take it further by doing enhancements over and above what's already there. Some of the things I'm excited about right now are the liquid metal bridge pins that allow us to increase the output of strings by three to four decibels. That's huge for one small component of a guitar.

"In conjunction with that we have used, on a couple of short run models, a composite bridge plate made with extremely thin carbon fibre on the outside with a very thin layer of spruce on the inside. It gives you a bridge plate that's lighter than maple but even stiffer Also we're looking at doing some things with tuning gears that I can't disclose, but will hopefully be coming to fruition soon.

"Another thing is carbon fibre neck rods for reinforcement. The new 000-30 Authentic 1919 has no truss rod in the neck and the show guitar is built with a carbon fibre rod. The neck is actually lighter than it would be if it was just wood and it also has more sustain because the rod acts as a conduit for the string energy to get through the neck quickly rather than be absorbed into the neck.

"So the new materials are allowing us to replicate early models with true vintage features. A vintage-style neck with a carbon fibre reinforcement rod rather than a truss rod is closer in weight and sound to the necks we were making before the First World War than it would be with a truss rod. However you can use it with modern strings and it won't bend out of shape."

Top The D-200 is made of a wealth of exotic woods, including Brazilian rosewood with inlaid pearl watch gears all over the pickguard and fretboard

Above Each D-200 also comes with a unique RGM watch with the same serial number as the guitar itself

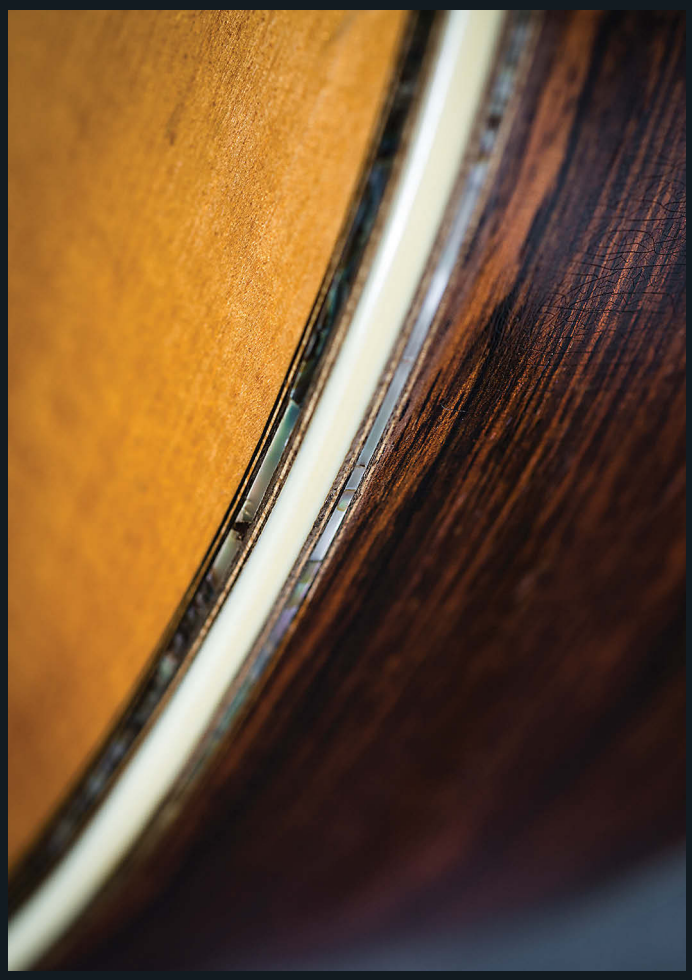
Are you guys already planning what you're going to do for the 3 Millionth Martin?
Not yet. We've maybe got eight to 10 years to get things in place... but probably next year we'll start thinking about it!

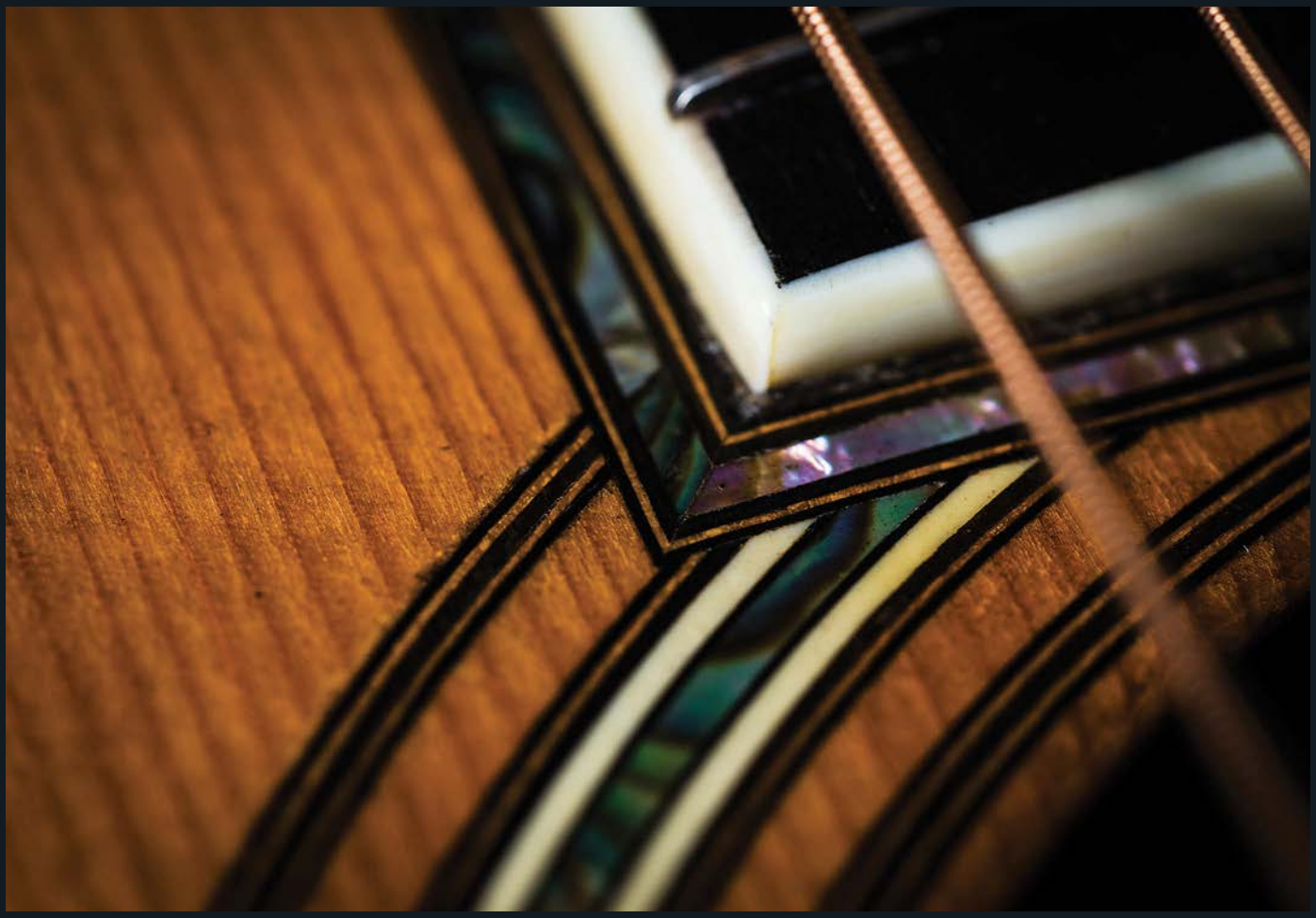
MUSEUM PIECE

OM-45 Deluxe 'Orchestra Model'

(1930, serial 44999, 10 of 11 made)

Considered the pinnacle of Martin's 'golden era', the OM-45 Deluxe is one of the most beautiful, valuable and great sounding guitars Martin has ever made, and an one of the company's earliest 14-fret guitars. A limited run of just 11 guitars, the Deluxes were made for professional Martin players, such as Roy Rogers.





Martin 00-17S & DC-18E

Something old, something new... and a lot more besides. **HUW PRICE** samples two offerings from Pennsylvania's finest...

These Martins come to us from opposite ends of the company's style spectrum, and the only shared features are spruce/mahogany bodies. One of them is an old-looking guitar with hidden modern features, while the other is a modern-looking guitar with hidden vintage appointments. Intriguing...

00-17S

We bow to no one in our enthusiasm for slotted headstocks, but you have to admit life is a lot easier with a solid headstock such as this, and the Golden Age open-gear tuners provide vintage looks with modern stability, accuracy and feel. The slope-shouldered body is resolutely old school, but the neck is slim and truss rod is adjustable. Despite the Dustbowl vibe of the matt finish, absence of grain filler and lack of decorative flourish, the build quality is pin neat, although Martin hasn't chosen to round over the fret ends above the body join.

In Use

It's love at first strum for this guitar hack. The 00-17S has everything you'd look for in a vintage-style Martin, with some added extras thrown into the package. It has the hair-trigger response of a vintage featherweight, with the airiness and delicately ethereal treble that, for many, are the quintessential hallmarks of a small-bodied classic Martin.

While these are laudable qualities, some find the rolled-off lows and underpowered mids that go along with these models can be a frustrating trade off. However, the 00-17S is distinguished by a nicely full and forward midrange and a low end that retains power and solidity down to drop C.

Maybe it's the shorter scale length that contributes to the easy playing feel

The 00-17S sports vintage-style Golden Age open-gear tuners

The 'enhance' control on the treble side of the DC-18E's soundhole adds body-sensor signal

and the large extra helping of warm woodiness, but the 00-17S puts this writer in mind of a vintage 1930s acoustic, such as a Gibson L-00. In fact, everything about the look and sound screams vintage – but the feel is quite contemporary. Rather than the fat and clubby neck or even the V profile you might expect, the 00-17S has a relatively slim C-shaped neck. Any initial disappointment was quickly dispelled by the 00-17S's superb playability.

This isn't an especially loud guitar, but it sustains for aeons and the string-to-string balance is superb. For fingerstyle, it makes life easy because strummed chords and picked notes are presented at relatively similar volume: it can make some of us sound like we have better technique than is actually the case!

Strummed or picked, the 00-17S seems to handle everything with poise. It's an utterly addictive little guitar that kept me amused for hours as I experimented with capos, slides and various tunings.

There are shades of nylon-strings, dobro and parlor that evoke an undeniably retro vibe but, naturally, some players may crave a little more power and upper-fret access. Even so, the 00-17S is what it is, and it's one of the most distinctive and enjoyable Martins we've ever encountered. With the caveat that this guitar arrived with half-dead strings – only because it had to be forcibly removed from the sweaty hands of a certain magazine editor – I can't come up with anything negative to say about it. Impressive.

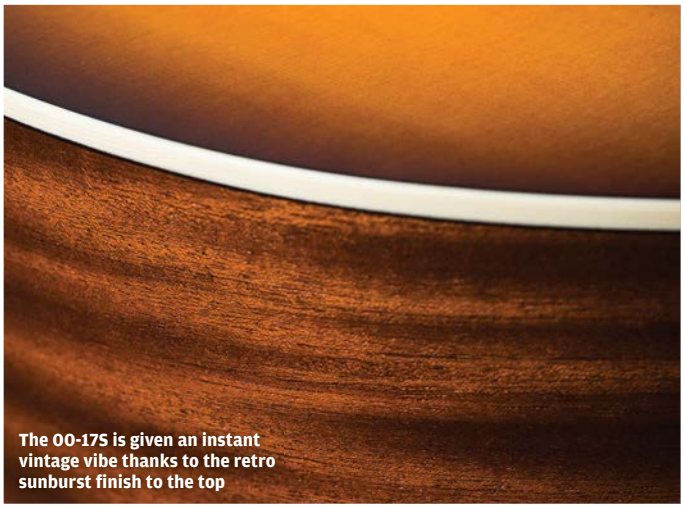
DC-18E

Despite its more modern appearance, the DC-18E is, like the 00-17S, a mixture of old and new. Lurking under the solid Sitka spruce top is a forward-shifted X brace, with scalloping and Martin has even used vintage 18-spec tortoiseshell binding. The neck's a decent width, and suits fingerstyle and strumming equally.

A Fishman Aura VT Enhance system is installed with an under-saddle transducer, a body sensor and a single digital dreadnought 'model'. A volume and mid-scoop control is mounted under the bass side of the soundhole and an 'enhance' control on the treble side adds the body sensor to the mix.

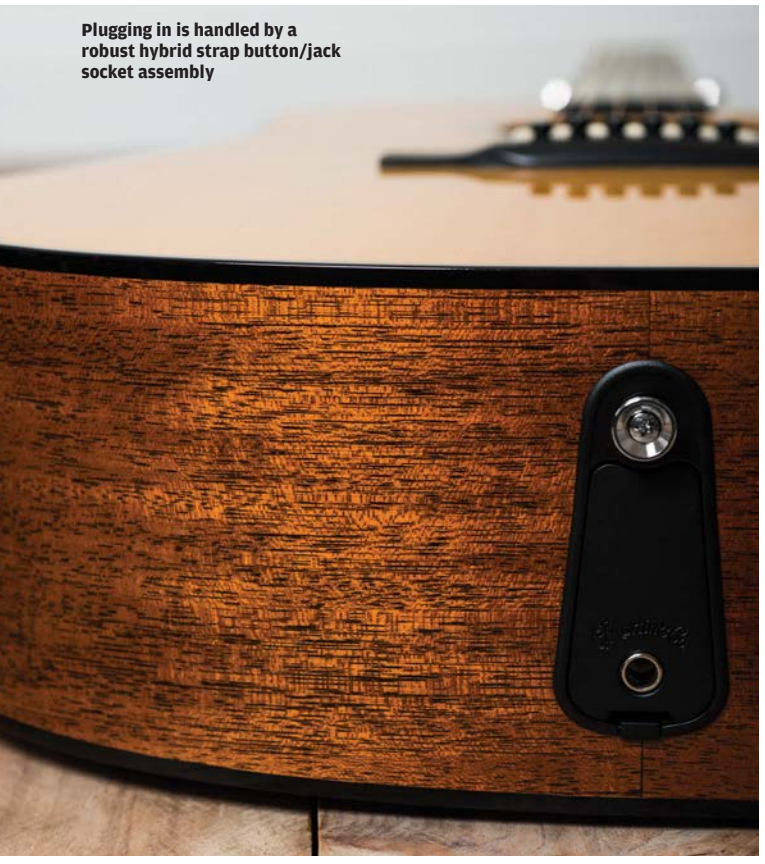
In Use

The DC-18E is a very good dreadnought and although it's not as exceptional as the 00-17S, you have to admire its bold and authoritative tone. The bass is deep, warm and



The 00-17S is given an instant vintage vibe thanks to the retro sunburst finish to the top

The 00-17S's square-tapered headstock with Script Authentic 1933 Overlay logo



Plugging in is handled by a robust hybrid strap button/jack socket assembly

The Aura's volume and mid-scoop controls are easily accessible in onstage playing position

nicely controlled, but not designed for sheer power. The treble rings clear without sounding pingy or brittle and midrange is more full and forward than is often the case with this design. Again, the balance and string-to-string definition is truly superb and the unplugged acoustic tone has all the hallmarks of a real pedigree instrument.

It's also about as far removed from the 00-17S as it could possibly be. Where the 00-17S oozes retro cool, the DC-18E is a more generic and general-purpose workhorse. That much is probably apparent from the cutaway and the onboard electronics. While you'd have no compunctions about mic'ing this guitar up in the studio, its onboard electronics mark it out as a stage performer every bit as much as a straight-ahead acoustic.

The Aura system is very impressive, because output level is high, noise level is vanishingly low and it sounds more like an acoustic guitar than an acoustic guitar with a piezo pickup. The DC-18E is also remarkably feedback resistant for an all-solid guitar.

The tone control acts by scooping the mids, which makes sense for fine tuning a dreadnought model. There is a sense that the highs have been slightly enhanced when the plugged and unplugged tones are compared and even at minimum scoop, some of the midrange is lost.

Even so, as plug-in-and-play electro tones go, the one offered by the Fishman Aura is a fantastic starting point and, to these ears, just pips Taylor's Expression System. It just sounds more authentically 'acoustic' in a direct comparison.

If you were operating the mixing desk, or an on stage acoustic amp, you'd probably roll off a little of the treble to zone in on the natural tone of the instrument. Of course, you can blend in the body sensor signal and it does add a certain acoustic airiness and natural dynamic response, but a lot of brightness comes along with it.

We find that just a hint is best for enhancing the Aura tone, because as you mix in more of the sensor, some odd phase shifts can occur in the mids. However, it does work well if you employ a more modern style, where the guitar body is used to create percussive sounds.

So here we have two entirely different Martins that very successfully achieve what they were designed to do. The DC-18E impresses, both acoustically and electrically, and you suspect its appeal will be wider. However of the two instruments on review here, we have to admit that it's the 00-17S that steals the show.

KEY FEATURES

Martin 00-17S

- **PRICE** £1,795
- **DESCRIPTION** All-solid acoustic guitar. Made in the USA
- **BUILD** Sitka spruce top, mahogany back and sides, glued mahogany neck, scalloped X bracing, ivoroid front binding, rosewood fingerboard and bridge, plastic bridge pins, bone nut and compensated bone saddle
- **HARDWARE** Golden Age open-gear tuners (aged)
- **ELECTRICS** N/A
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes
- **FINISHES** Whiskey Sunset Sunburst and Black Smoke
- **SCALE LENGTH** 631mm/24 7/8"
- **NECK WIDTH** 44mm at nut, 54mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 18mm at first fret, 21mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 38.5mm at nut, 54mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 1.6kg/3.52lbs

Guitar & Bass AWARD EXCELLENCE 10/10

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Surprisingly full bass
+ Excellent string-to-string balance
+ Easy playability
+ Very woody midrange
+ Fantastic vintage vibe
+ Superb tuners

– Fret ends not rounded above the body join

An unforgettably good small-bodied Martin at a relatively affordable price for a USA-made model, with vintage looks and tone, but modern playability

10/10

KEY FEATURES

Martin DC-18E

- **PRICE** £2,765
- **DESCRIPTION** All-solid electro-acoustic guitar. Made in the USA
- **BUILD** Sitka spruce top, mahogany back and sides, glued mahogany high-performance taper neck, forward-shifted scalloped X bracing, tortoise body binding, ebony fingerboard and bridge, plastic bridge pins, bone nut and compensated Tusq saddle
- **HARDWARE** Grover open-gear tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Fishman Aura VT Enhance
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes
- **FINISH** Gloss body and satin neck
- **SCALE LENGTH** 644mm/25 3/8"
- **NECK WIDTH** 44mm at nut, 54mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20mm at first fret, 22mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 38.5mm at nut, 54.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 1.975kg/4.35lbs
- **CONTACT** www.martinguitar.com

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Solid bass
+ Good string-to-string balance
+ Nice mix of the traditional and the cutting edge
+ Fine-sounding pickup
+ Impressive feedback resistance
+ Sweet treble

– Feels slightly heavy

A well-made guitar with striking aesthetics and a fine-sounding pickup system, perfect for on stage use by the contemporary singer-songwriter

8/10

QUICK
BOOK YOUR EARLY BIRD TICKETS!

THE VINYL FESTIVAL

23-24 SEPTEMBER 2017
PRINTWORKS LONDON

SATURDAY

HUEY MORGAN
FUN LOVIN' CRIMINALS / 6 MUSIC DJ
DJ SET AND Q&A

STEVE LAMACQ
BBC 6 MUSIC DJ
DJ SET AND Q&A

SUNDAY

TIM BURGESS
THE CHARLATANS / AUTHOR
DJ SET AND Q&A

EDITH BOWMAN
VIRGIN RADIO BREAKFAST SHOW HOST
DJ SET AND Q&A

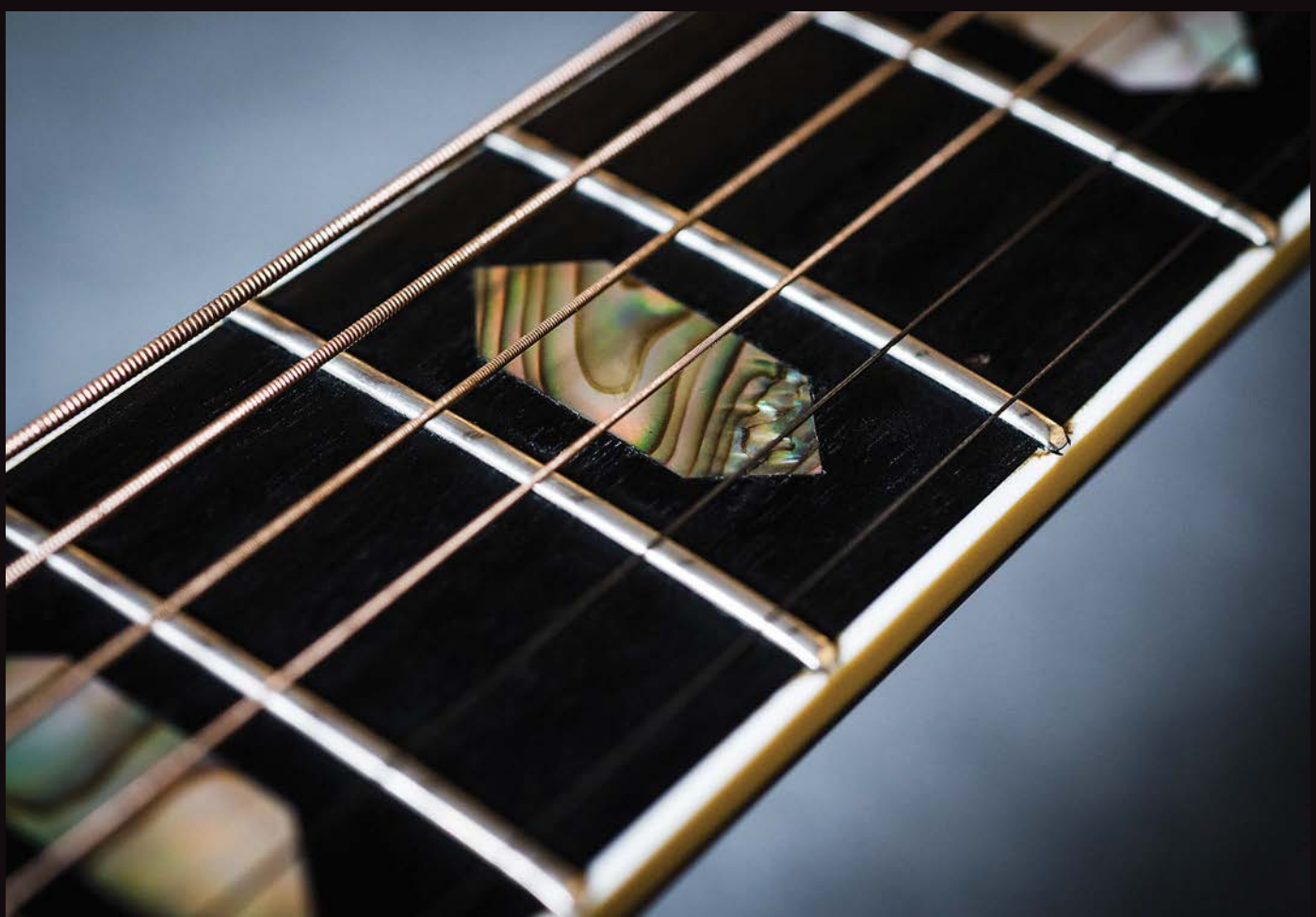
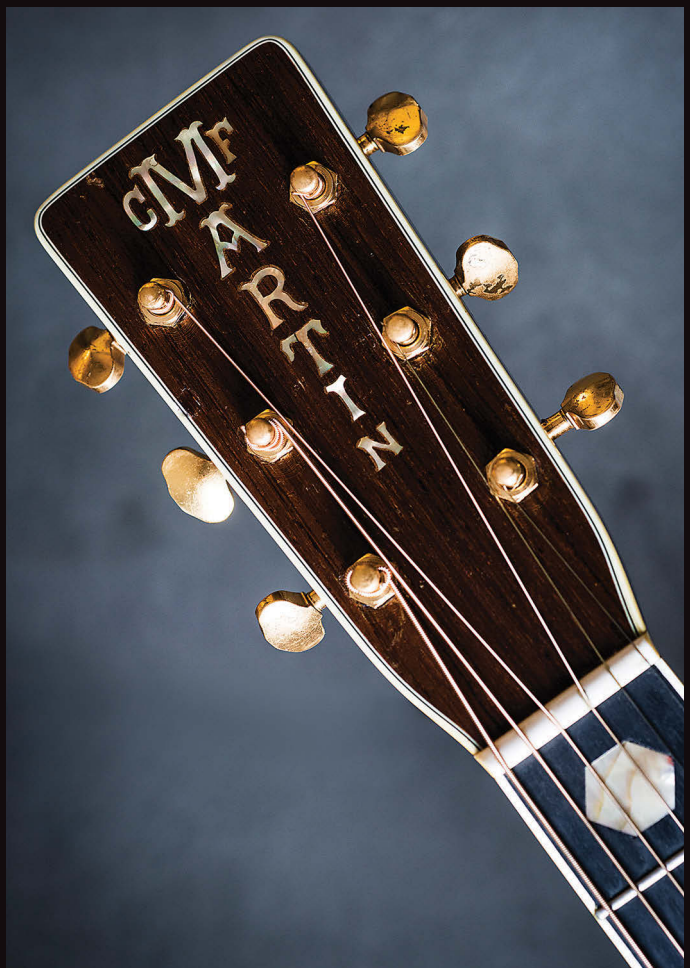
CRATE DIGGING **HARDWARE** **HIGH STREET** INDIE LABELS **LIVE DJs** CRAFT BEER **STREET FOOD** *and more...*

www.thevinylfestival.com

vinylfestuk @vinylfestuk

MUSEUM PIECE
Martin D-45
The 'Holy Grail' of acoustic guitars
(1942, serial 81578)

Before the Second World War, Martin made a total of 91 D-45 guitars – this is number 80. The prewar D-45 is highly sought after and is often described as the 'Holy Grail' of acoustic guitars. The D-45 originally came as a 12-fret guitar with snowflake inlays, that was owned by cowboy legend, Gene Autry. However, over time the 14-fret models gained popularity, and eventually the snowflakes were replaced with the bolder hexagon inlays that we see here. Stephen Stills owns two D-45s from this era, while country star Marty Stuart owns a D-45 previously owned by Johnny Cash and Hank Williams Jr.



C.F. MARTIN

Davey Graham

If you were to stick your neck out and name one person as the source of the diverse and hugely influential British acoustic folk movement, Davey Graham might well be the one you'd pick. Graham passed away in 2008 but in 2005, **RICK BATEY** caught up with the Leicestershire-born maestro as he looked back on his 1960s heyday...

Davey Graham can claim many remarkable firsts. He was the first player in the UK to perform and record self-composed solo guitar instrumentals. He was the first to travel to faraway exotic lands and, like a musical Marco Polo, to return bearing exotic flavours and modes. He was the first to blend Irish music with Indian-flavoured ragas, and English folk tunes with jazz. The first to transform American country blues into a new, complex, contrapuntal musical form. These innovations all captured on the five Decca LPs *Folk, Blues And Beyond*, *Folk Roots, New Routes*, *Hat*, *Midnight Man* and *Large As Life And Twice As Natural* – which have been reissued on Fledg'ling Records.

This pioneering creativity also meant that Graham was the first guitar player in Britain to sit in a folk club and dazzle his audiences with his fingers alone, and at his feet – whether metaphorically or in reality – sat a group of players who would, in turn, develop and refine acoustic guitar music still further. Those musicians, such as Martin Carthy, Bert Jansch, John Renbourn, Ralph McTell, Jimmy Page and Paul Simon, among many others, are often unstinting in their appreciation of Graham's importance. "Davey's playing was unbelievable," Jansch told *Guitar & Bass* back in 2000. "After Brownie McGhee and Big Bill Broonzy, I got almost everything from Davey Graham. And remember, he was the first guitarist to play his own stuff on a record. Before him, when it came to original material, no record company wanted to know."

Graham's influence extended out of the folk clubs of Soho and out across the Atlantic. Without him, quite possibly, there would have been no new-age fingerstyle revolution: no Michael Hedges, no Alex de Grassi. Also, he was a near-mystical figure with a 'difficult' reputation that proved a kind of inspiration in itself. "I never heard him until after I'd heard Jansch and Renbourn," claims fingerstyle wizard Pierre Bensusan, "But there was a folk club in Paris that had a very striking poster of him on the wall, and I found myself fantasising about his music without ever having actually heard it. Very strange..."

DAVEY AT HOME

Today we find the 65-year-old guitarist at home in his flat in Camden in a cheerful mood, his close-cropped hair impressively intact, and wearing an open-necked shirt with an elegant bundle of multi-coloured laces acting as a gypsy-style necktie. There's a biography of the jazz trumpeter Chet Baker on a chair, and a collection of precious vinyl, the most visible of which – Segovia, Theolonius Monk, Charlie Parker's *Now's The Time*, Sonny Stitt's *Learning The Blues* and a rare LP by the West Indian tenor player Wilton 'Bogey' Gaynair – give a glimpse of the width and depth of Davey's musical studies.

Our appointment could not strictly be described as an interview; it's more like an invitation to enjoy an elliptical monologue, seasoned with just a tiny hint of wind-up and delivered with great joviality and panache in a surprisingly cut-glass accent. Occasionally he breaks off mid-stream, seizes the acoustic that leans against the sofa at his side and launches into an impromptu recital; at one point he pulls out an inspired reading of Billie Holiday's *God Bless The Child*; at another, a snappy version of *Birth Of The Blues*, climaxing with a flourish on an unidentifiable chord of outrageous density. He might not possess the huge repertoire that carried him through so many late-night gigs at Soho's Les Cousins club, but he's still a showman and, when the mood carries him, he can deliver a heck of a tune.

David Michael Gordon Graham was born in Leicester in 1940 to a Scottish father and a mother who came from Guyana. He grew up in London's Notting Hill and first picked up a guitar in his early teens. At the age of 16 he ran headlong into the first great post-war youth music movement, skiffle, spearheaded by Lonnie Donegan and heralding a punk-style musical freedom, sexy rhythms and the addictive songs of Leadbelly and Woody Guthrie. ›

All images © Getty

A dapper-looking Graham performs at London's 12 Bar Club in 2001

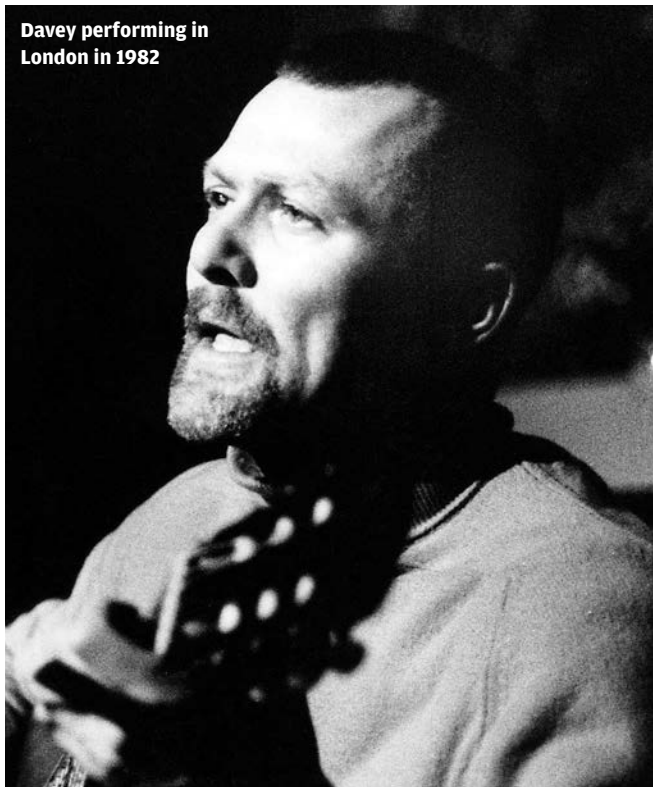
Young Graham took lessons from a man he remembers as being called Errol Wall ("Six miles away in Wandsworth... that was a mistake", he cackles) and before long emerged with a huge repertoire of songs and pieces gleaned from every source he could summon. As with Robert Johnson, however, this leap into technical brilliance was no voodoo miracle, but the result of intense practise for hours each day, often on borrowed guitars, as decent instruments were still a rarity.

All the woodshedding paid off fast, and in 1959 the 19-year-old Davy (he initially styled his stage name without the 'e', before switching to 'Davey' later on) found himself on a TV documentary entitled *Hound Dogs And Bach Addicts: The Guitar Craze*, where he followed old hands such as Donegan, Julian Bream and Bert Weedon with a devastatingly complicated blues and a version of *Cry Me A River*: a performance watched open-mouthed by a number of one-day-to-be-famous guitar strummers on their TVs at home. This advanced level of playing displayed so early is less of a surprise when you learn that Graham was already absorbing Miles Davis and Ornette Coleman, as well as whatever blues could be found, including Snooks Eaglin, Josh White and Muddy Waters. Some of this material was emerging from future bandleader and father of British blues Alexis Korner, and before long the pair were playing together in Blues Incorporated.

> *"I loved Paul Simon's version of 'Angi'. He asked if he could do it and of course I was delighted"*

"When I met Alexis he was wearing a flash black shirt and playing all this incredible stuff," hoots Davey, grabbing his guitar and launching loudly into song, blasting out a verse from Jesse Fuller's *Ninety Nine Years*, "I been in prison 20 years or more, shot my woman with a .44, I'll be here until my dying day, 99 years and one dark day..." he sings. "Bloody amazing!"

"Alexis was funny," he adds ruminatively. "One day he said, 'I'm going to form a band, would you like to join?' I said, 'Very much'. One time he turned to me on stage – he was Jewish, remember – and said, 'Let's go and bomb [fascist leader] Oswald Mosely!'"



Davey performing in London in 1982

Graham performs with his Martin OM model in 2008

ALL IN A ZITHER

Davey next got a job backing the popular Aussie zither player Shirley Abacair ("What a summer we had, doing TV, radio, the Festival Hall... what fun it was") and then spent six months sharing a house with the blues singer and guitarist John Mayall and his enormous music collection. Inevitably Davey became part of the early Bluesbreakers, with a very green John McVie on bass.

"I met up with Mayall because he connected with Alexis... I was a little ahead of him on the recording side," reflects Graham. "Mayall never had a harsh word for anybody. A true artist. I remember him once painting an archtop guitar to look like Elvis's. When we went to bed at night he would switch on the radio and we'd hear the announcer's voice going 'This is the *Voice Of America Jazz Hour*... daa daa!' And he'd record the whole thing.

"At one point he lived in a tree-house in his uncle's garden in Manchester – and he had an electric organ in it! I can remember him order the band to wear jeans – that was a first. Once we were going to a gig a couple of hours outside London and the car was absolutely crammed, so John simply climbed into the boot and when we reached the other end he just opened the lid and climbed out, as cool as a cucumber. Amazing... and yet, despite all that, he was just so completely normal."

It was also around this time that Davey's travels began: "I went to get away from it all," he explains simply. He busked in Paris and on the French Riviera, and wound up playing private parties for the likes of Elizabeth Taylor and Sean Connery. Many years before the Stones' famous North African expeditions, Davey took a train down through Spain and wound up in Morocco, drinking in the local music. He visited Greece and Turkey and spent some six months in India, discovering the sounds of the sitar and the sarod.

Only a few of these far-flung influences showed through on Davey's first album, 1963's *The Guitar Player*. Instead, the real cannons had been fired a year earlier on a little EP he had shared with Alexis Korner, entitled *3/4 AD*. The title track was a clanging guitar duet in 3/4 time; then there was Davey's *Leaving Train Blues*, a hyperactive showcase pushing a pentatonic riff against a major drone in thrilling fashion; and finally his most famous composition, *Angi*.

SINCERE FLATTERY

There were a handful of songs around this time that spawned a million soundalikes. Jackson C Frank's *Blues Run The Game* was one; its addictive alternating thumbpicking pattern and air of world-weary romanticism had a deep and lasting effect on every young singer-songwriter. Similarly, *Angi* was a spark that lit the tinder of a generation of guitar players. Played as if in A minor but confusingly capo'd at the third fret, *Angi* featured some tricky syncopation, a revelatory bassline and a lonesome, bluesy string bend for a hook. It became one of the trademark tunes of the early 60s and a watershed piece for every aspiring guitarist: this included Bert Jansch, whose version ironically became better known than Graham's original, and Paul Simon, loose in London at the time and soaking up tunes like a sponge, covered it on Simon & Garfunkel's 1966 release *Sounds Of Silence*.

"I loved Paul's version. He asked if he could do it and of course I was delighted," says Davey, reversing the reputation Paul Simon won by borrowing Martin Carthy's *Scarborough Fair*. "I was the cheeky bastard who went around covering all these songs without asking [such as *Homeward Bound* and *I Am A Rock* from 1969 album, *Hat*]. What a piece of cheek! Hatchet jobs. Some very scruffy.

"Paul was genuine with people. He dossed down on the floor with the rest of us. I remember having a wonderful experience hearing him play at the Troubadour, it was so quiet but the place was packed... wonderful. Also, he was singing all those lovely songs – so it wasn't just bloody guitar! [laughs]"

However, it was another EP, *From A London Hootenanny*, that contained perhaps Graham's most startling and important piece, a three-minute rendition of *She Moved Through The Fair* in a new, self-invented tuning called DADGAD. In this initial version he begins by stating the plaintive traditional Irish melody and then kicks it up a gear with a funky rhythm that's somewhere between an Indian raga and a country blues, decorated with outrageous pull-offs, a mind-boggling section where he plays an insane rhythm on just one string and, just for effect, a cheeky ›

little blues riff. Since the guitar strings were probably about six months old, the recording is a million miles away from the ringing, expensively reverb'd sound of today, and yet *She Moved Through The Fair* remains quite simply the blueprint for the entire Celtic fingerstyle guitar genre.

NEW ROUTES

The impact of that tune led directly to Graham's next job, an album backing the young folksinger Shirley Collins entitled *Folk Roots, New Routes*. Although guitarists had tried accompanying trad folk songs before – such as one of Davey's other big influences, Londoner Steve Benbow – *Folk Roots, New Routes* was, astonishingly, the first time such a collaboration had been released on vinyl. The record was released in 1965, and it earned the guitarist the grand sum of about 30 quid.

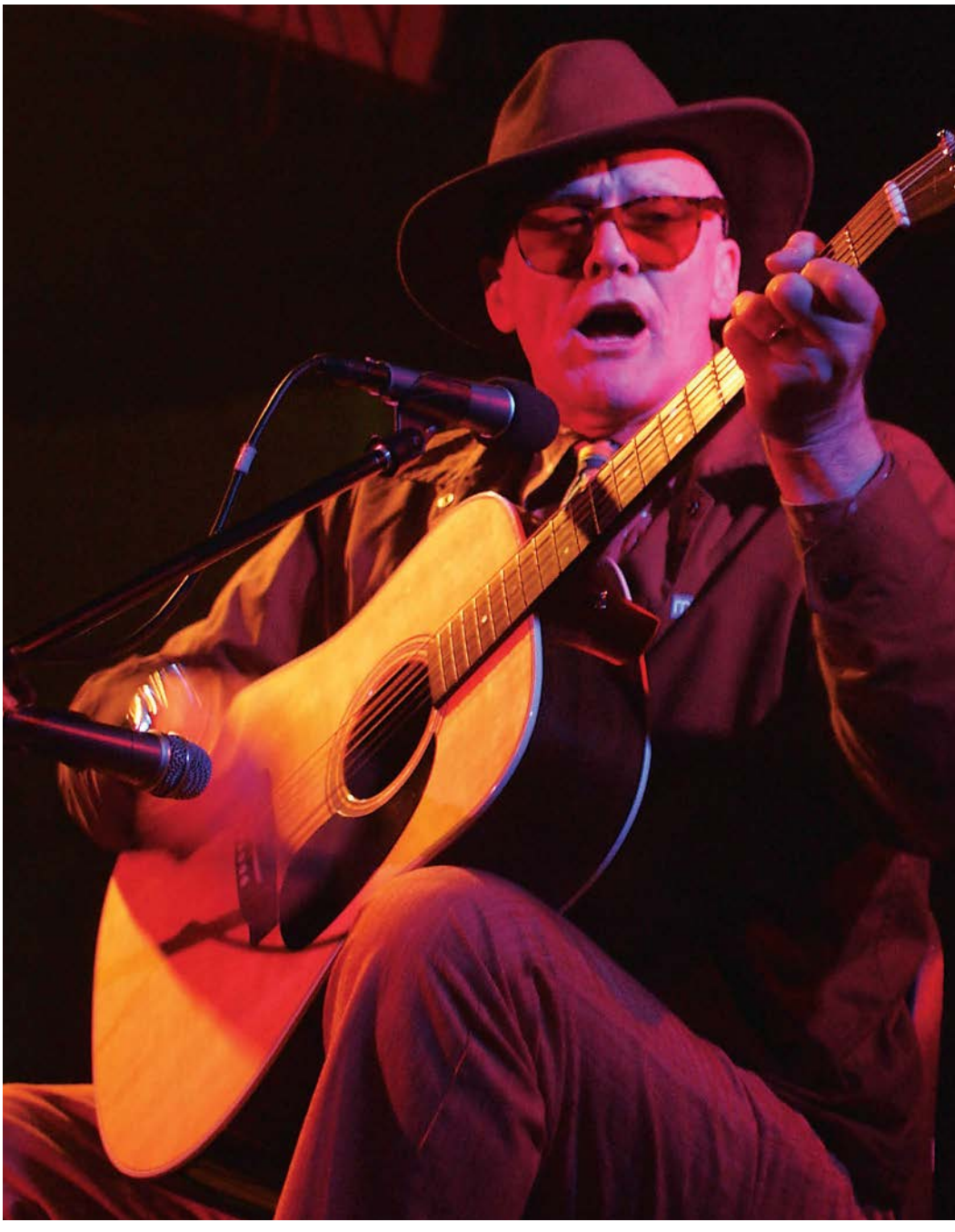
"Shirley had already been to America with [legendary folklorist and blues archivist] Alan Lomax," recalls Davey. "Good gracious, she'd been to places like Parchment Farm in Mississippi, so she'd learned all these stories from the real blues players. Despite that she was a nice Sussex girl with, [laughs] a church upbringing!

"Her voice was so pure... God, the cheek I had. I suppose I tried to augment her beautiful singing, but I was playing all these impossible tortuous arrangements, strange modes, jazz keys, all with no particular relation to the purity of her style. I wasn't aware of what I was taking on... I was slightly below the salt, I suppose. Shirley confessed later that she didn't much like it. I said, 'Why not?' She said, 'It's fidgety'," Davey laughs uproariously. "Fidgety! Anyway, she was a bit of an angel."

He may demur, but the jazziness and complexity of Graham's guitar playing and the direct simplicity of Collins' very English voice made for a fascinating and bewitching combination. In those backward times the LP was very much frowned upon by the exclusivist 'Folk Nazis' based at London's Cecil Sharpe House, then the bastion of English folklore studies, but younger, more open-minded souls knew a good thing when they heard it – including future members of Fairport Convention, who took the Graham/Collins template and ran with it, even covering some of the same songs such as *Reynardine* and *Nottamun Town*.

BEYOND FOLK

Within a few weeks of the release of *Folk Roots, New Routes*, Decca brought out a Davey Graham LP called *Folk, Blues & Beyond*. The folk came from tunes such as Seven *Gypsies* and *Black Is The Colour*, while blues was well represented with classics including *Cocaine, Rock Me Baby, Goin' Down Slow* and *I Can't Keep From Crying Sometimes*. The 'beyond' was the most telling bit, and it began in the very first notes with an inspired Indian intro grafted onto Leadbelly's *Leavin' Blues*. Today, though perhaps not with the strongest vocals ever recorded, the way *Folk, Blues & Beyond* juxtaposes so many disparate influences is still remarkable. However, Davey himself seems curiously dismissive of his efforts to bring east and west together.

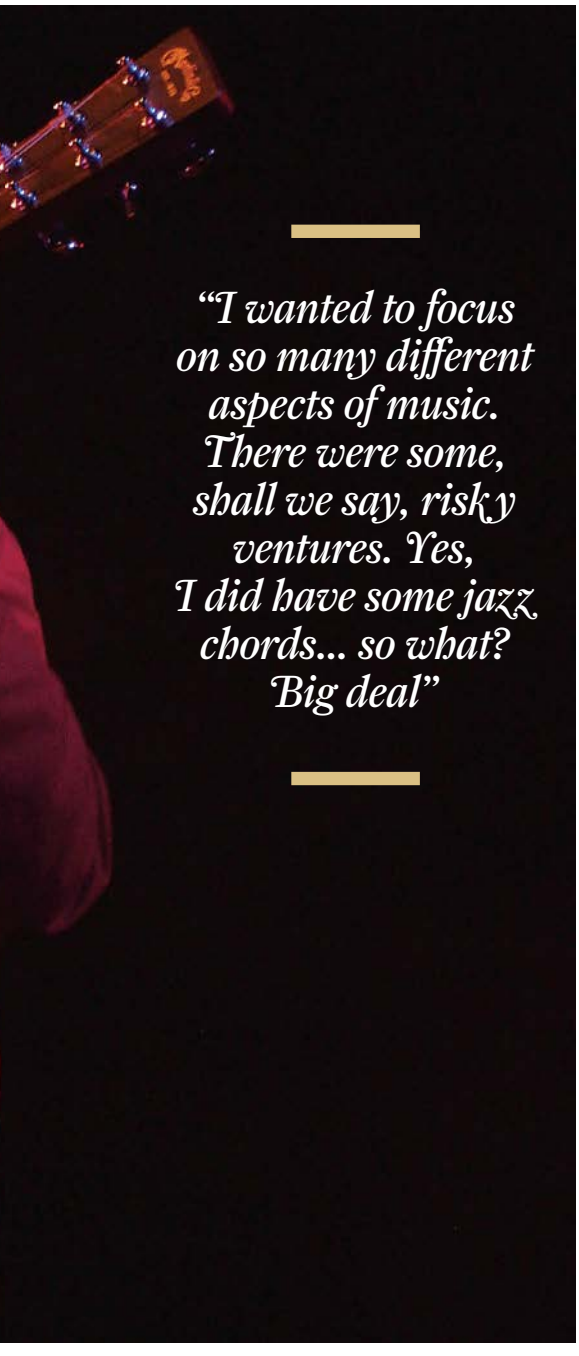


"Of course things would happen if you were hearing Charlie Parker and Leadbelly at the same time, in the same record collection," he says crisply. "I wanted to focus on so many different aspects of music. There were some, shall we say, risky ventures. Yes, I did have some jazz chords... so what? Big deal.

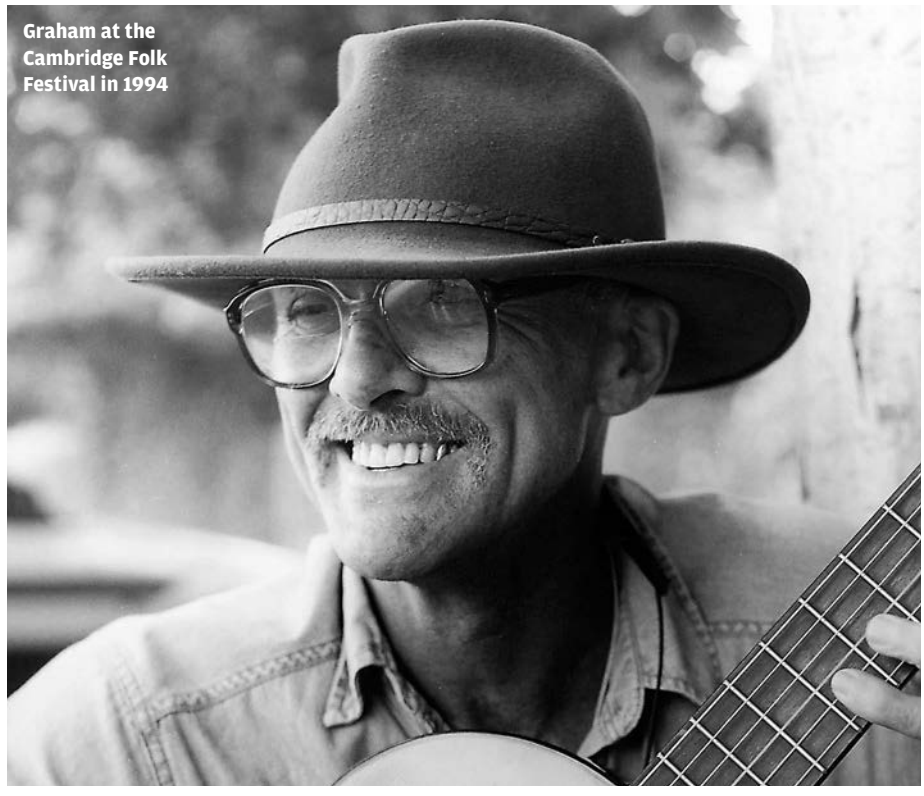
"As for the soi-disant fusion, it wasn't authentic... no. I was quite abstruse and out of the question. People say, 'Oh, you're the fusion man, the legendary such-and-such...' I've had all the compliments, but when you're hearing Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar Kahn, well, it all seems like the arrogance of youth."

Graham also has contemptuous things to say of his brilliant forays into blues territory. "I was taking a risk," he now says. "It was appalling, because none of us had any idea, really. What did we know of Mississippi chain gangs, or the kind of lives that these people led? Nothing! What a load of cheek I had.

"In fact, there's just so little we know. I mean, before Robert Johnson there was another Robert Johnson, and 15 years before him there was another one. It's all about who managed to get recorded. But all the same, when I first heard Muddy Waters when I was 18, and then Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, I was like, 'Woah! Crikey!' It hit me all at once. Some of it was depressing,



"I wanted to focus on so many different aspects of music. There were some, shall we say, risky ventures. Yes, I did have some jazz chords... so what? Big deal"



Graham at the Cambridge Folk Festival in 1994

though... that's the trouble with blues. Today I'd rather listen to [obscure Hawaiian-meets-hillbilly showman] Tex Jenks Carman. He's one of the most extraordinary bluesmen, and hardly known at all."

CHASING TALES

Back in early 1965, with not one but two LPs in the shops and with his reputation as an extraordinary player growing fast, Graham was on the verge of a real career breakthrough. However, instead of booking gigs up and down the country he threw commerce and career to the winds and disappeared off to the Middle East. Worse than that, an over-literal idolatry of the great jazz players such as Charlie Parker and Chet Baker led Graham down the black hole of drug addiction. He would emerge by 1968, yet by then time had been lost... time that many of the players Graham had influenced spent touring, plotting future developments in progressive folk music and limiting their recreational intake to real ale and the odd spliff.

He remains indignant about the damage to his name; "I haven't taken heroin for 40 years," he pointedly observes. On the other hand, he's happy to relay other stories from the far side of the 1960s. "One of us, the son of a Nobel prize-winning scientist I might add, broke into the Royal Veterinarians' College and stole some ampoules of LSD 25," he expounds with glee. "It was doo-lally, completely bananas. You know what it's like when you wake up? Well, imagine waking up, but you're already awake... then waking up again... and then waking up again..."

Despite his travels of both body and mind, he managed to keep recording and released three more albums before the end of the 60s. *Hat* (1969), is a fine listen, taking in Beatles and Paul Simon covers, some Willie Dixon-penned blues, two classical 'fingerbusters' and a globe-trotting escapade called *Bulgarian Dance*. *Midnight Man* (1966) and *Large As Life And Twice As Natural* (1969), are equally worthy of your attention; the former is bluesy, the latter has a full, progressive band in *Hat* style and features a brave cover of Joni Mitchell's *Both Sides Now* and two brilliant Indian-tinged explorations, *Blue Raga* and *Sunshine Raga*.

KEEPING IT LOOSE

Today, though his playing is looser and more fractured than it once was – and his style was never 'easy' to begin with – Graham remains a benchmark for freedom of musical thought. Though he played the folk clubs, he combined the skills of a classical arranger with a jazzman's ear. In blithely mixing the sounds and scales learned on his travels he opened up the doors to what we now call world music, and simply by demonstrating that the steel-string guitar was a viable solo instrument, his effect has been incalculable.

Martin & Graham

The story of how Davey became a Martin man

While Graham was known for playing various guitars in his long, storied career – notably a Martin 000-18 – towards the tail end of his career, he took the stage holding a Martin guitar that bore his name. The Martin OM Davy Graham wasn't a slavish reproduction of a vintage instrument, but a stunning new guitar that sadly Davey was only able to use for a few months before his death. Far more than just a name on the back of the headstock, Graham and Martin's UK distributor, Westside, collaborated closely with the Custom Shop to produce an instrument that was perfect for him. The OM's looks are as subtle and understated as its owner's guitar style was intricate and dynamic, with the gloss Sitka spruce top paired with classic East Indian rosewood back and sides. The marquetry on the back is beautifully done, yet subtle, while the fingerboard is bare save for tiny dots at the fifth, seventh and ninth frets. All in all, it's a beautifully and understated instrument for a guitarist whose talent and influence could never be ignored.

Martin 000-17

Underneath a open-pore black finish that isn't exactly traditional, the Martin 000-17 is as classic as they come. **HUW PRICE** goes into the black...

Picture a Martin in your head, and chances are it'll have a classic gloss-finished spruce top – but that's not all that comes out of Nazareth. We look at the Dust Bowl-styled, Whiskey Sunset-finished 00-17S on p86, and here we're checking out its bigger brother, the 000-17, which comes in an equally retro-vibed Black Smoke finish. Neither are conventional Martin fare, but you have to say they both look stunning.

In real life, 'Black Smoke' is more like an extremely dark brown and the pickguard is an off-white ivoroid plastic. Since ivoroid is a commonly used binding material we're surprised Martin is using non-matching plain cream binding, instead, but it doesn't detract.

Wood-wise, the 000-17 is all-solid, and the Golden Age open-gear tuners are nicely relic'd. We're also happy to see that the nut and compensated saddle are both bone. The black plastic bridge pins fit the moody vibe, but we might consider an upgrade.

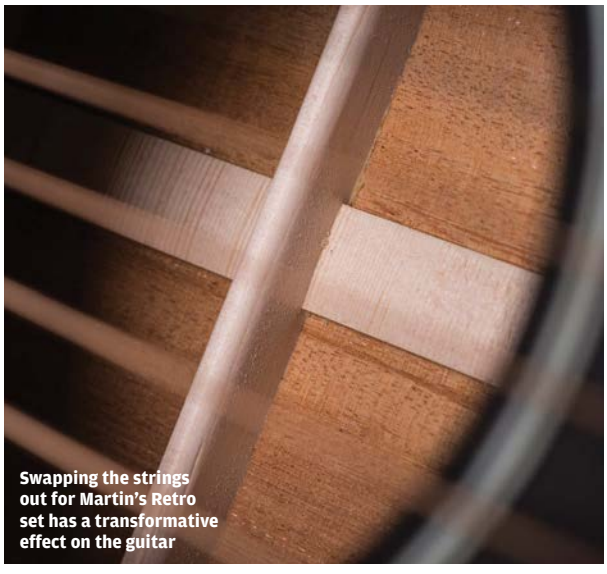
In Use

Since it's so closely related to the 00-17S, it's hardly surprising this sounds fairly similar. It's louder and deeper than its little brother, but retains the same hair-trigger dynamics and indisputably vintage tone. It's also starting to pull off that lingering harmonic effect we've experienced with some vintage acoustics. Despite having gone through a Plek setup, it does have more rattle and buzz than the 00-17S, but this can be largely overcome with minor playing adjustments and if you've played a lot of vintage acoustics, it won't phase you.

The bass strings have punch, power and superb definition. You can dig in

The open-gear Golden Age tuners have been nicely aged

The Black Smoke open-pore finish is unusual for Martin, but it gives an inescapably retro vibe



Swapping the strings out for Martin's Retro set has a transformative effect on the guitar

hard with a thumbpick or plectrum and the 000-17 rewards you with gutsy exuberance. Naturally you may feel drawn towards blues picking, bottleneck and open-tuned folk adventures, because the guitar's voice is so ideally suited to that sort of repertoire.

There's no doubt that there's a rough-edged and slightly brash charm that demands a careful and considered playing approach to tame the beast. The clarity is such that if you make a mistake, there's nothing to hide behind.

When handing this guitar over for review, Martin mentioned to us that sample models of the 000-17 have been going to trade shows strung with the company's own Retro Monel strings, and that we should give them a try during our testing process.

We're already big fans of the Retro strings here at *G&B*, but we weren't prepared for how transformative an effect swapping the supplied long-life phosphor bronze strings out for a set of Retros would have on this guitar.

It's not so much a reduction in brightness as a softening of an upper-mid resonance peak that removes any brashness and, oddly enough, minimises the fret buzzing, too. As the inherent brightness of fresh spruce mellows, a set of phosphor bronze strings may very well produce good results too, but for now the Retros help to make this guitar 'settle' much more quickly by enhancing the rich bass and bolstering the mids.

This creates the illusion that you're playing a much older Martin guitar – which, after all, is what the 000-17 is really about.

KEY FEATURES

Martin 000-17

- **PRICE** £1,795
- **DESCRIPTION** All-solid acoustic guitar. Made in the USA
- **BUILD** Sitka spruce top, solid mahogany back and sides, glued mahogany neck, scalloped X bracing, ivoroid front binding, rosewood fingerboard and bridge, plastic bridge pins, bone nut and compensated bone saddle
- **HARDWARE** Golden Age open-gear tuners (aged)
- **ELECTRICS** N/A
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes
- **FINISH** Black Smoke & Whiskey Sunset Sunburst
- **SCALE LENGTH** 632.5mm/24.9"
- **NECK WITH** 44mm at nut, 54mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 19mm at first fret, 22mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 38.5mm at nut, 54.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 3.64lbs/1.65kg
- **CONTACT** www.martinguitar.com

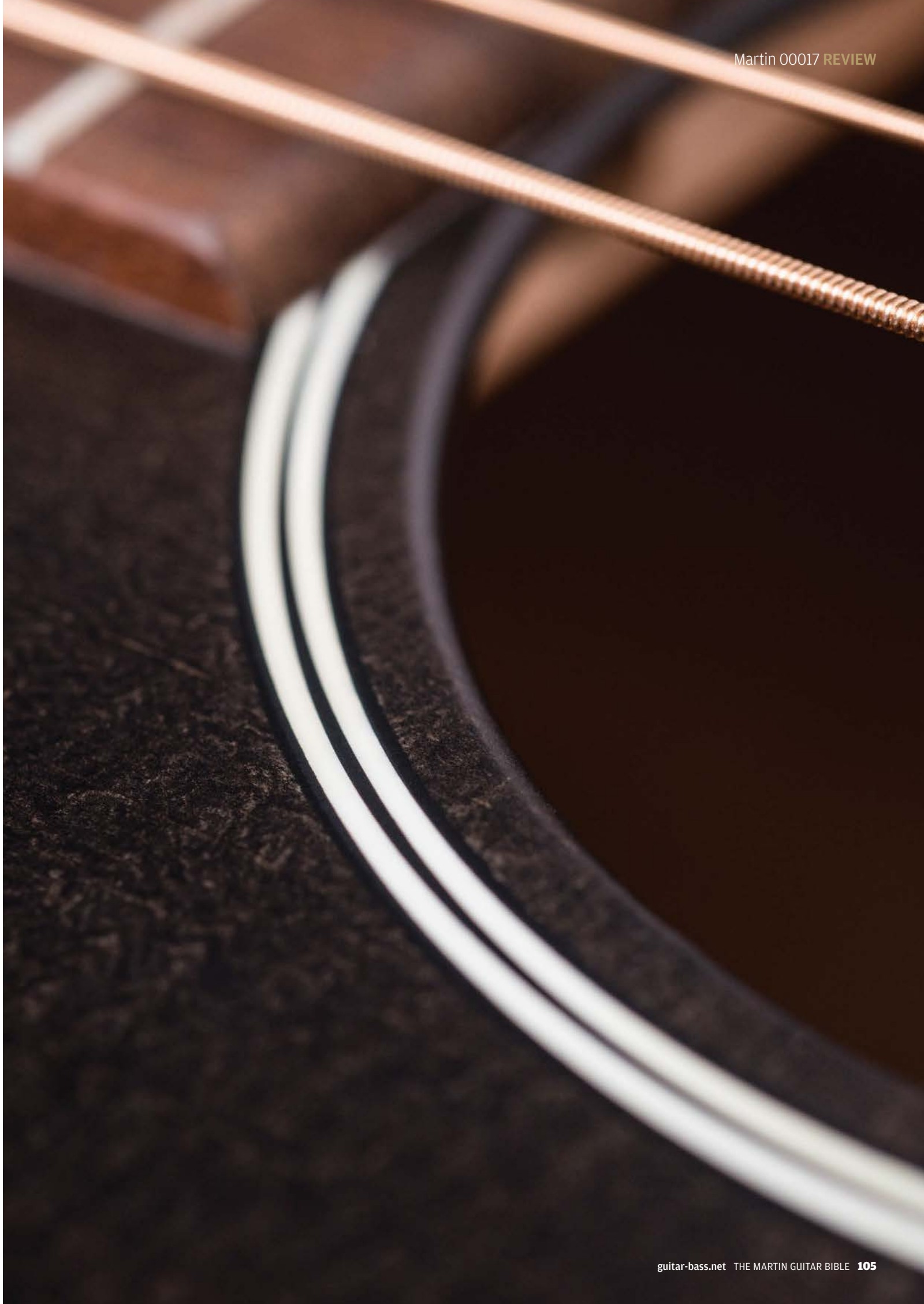
Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Solid bass and impressive volume
+ Easy playability
+ Very woody tonal quality
+ Superb tuners

– Fret noise is apparent with the supplied strings

Not quite as woody and majestic sounding as the 12-fret 00-17S but it's louder, deeper and more powerful

9/10

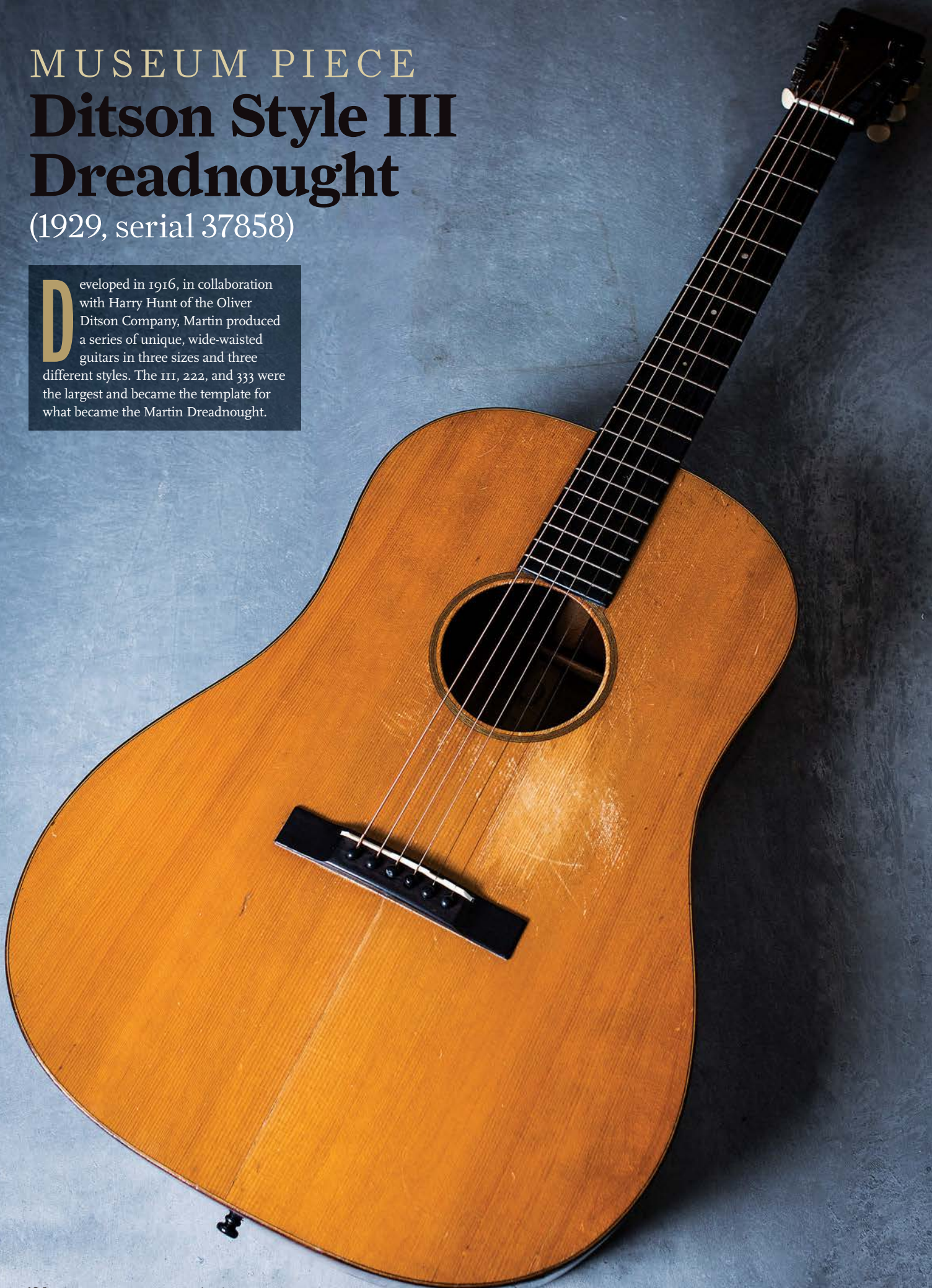


MUSEUM PIECE

Ditson Style III Dreadnought

(1929, serial 37858)

Developed in 1916, in collaboration with Harry Hunt of the Oliver Ditson Company, Martin produced a series of unique, wide-waisted guitars in three sizes and three different styles. The 111, 222, and 333 were the largest and became the template for what became the Martin Dreadnought.



OLIVER
DITSON
CO.
BOSTON
NEW YORK

OLIVER
DITSON
CO

Hiss Golden Messenger

Words: **Gary Walker**

Hailed widely as one of the best albums of 2016, *Heart Like A Levee* saw Hiss Golden Messenger receive the critical acclaim that bandleader MC Taylor's years of musical toil richly deserved. He tells us about the journey, his love of Martin guitars and why the musical heritage of the South is so vital to his music...

It's been a long journey for MC Taylor and his band, Hiss Golden Messenger. It's a journey that shows sometimes you have to slow down in order to reach your destination. And for Taylor, that destination, at the end of a winding road pocked with the pitfalls of fickle fortune, came in the shape of many pundits' record of 2016, the outstanding *Heart Like A Levee*.

After spending more than a decade playing in West Coast hardcore band Ex-Ignota and alt-country act Court & Spark, with musical life-partner Scott Hirsch – with a brief interlude working as a PE teacher thrown in too – it appeared that the fleeting beam of musical success would forever refuse to shine upon Taylor. It was time for a change, and so the Orange County, California native packed up and moved east to North Carolina in 2009.

It was there, settled in with his wife and children enjoying a more pastoral existence among the old tobacco mills of the Tar Heel state, and studying post-graduate folklore at the University of North Carolina, that Hiss Golden Messenger blossomed. Having accepted that his musical career had stalled before take-off, success sought out MC Taylor.

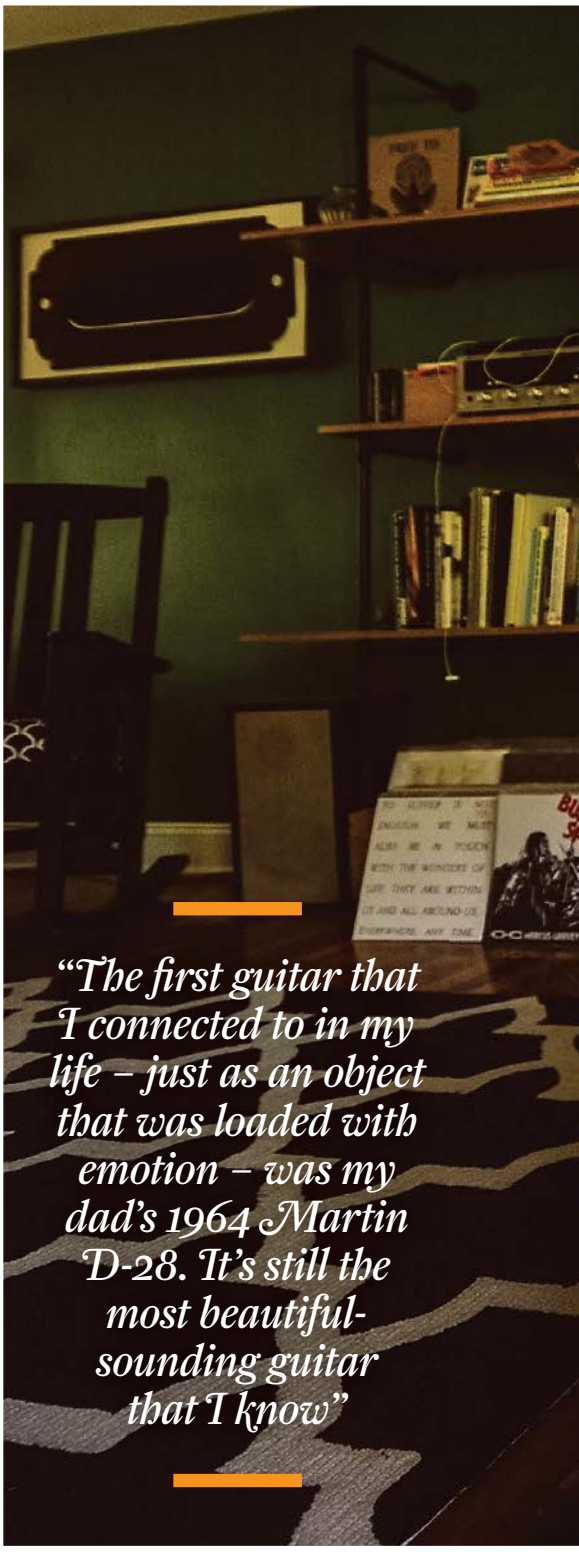
After returning home from lengthy live commitments for 2014's *Lateness Of Dancers*, Taylor, an accomplished and versatile guitarist who began playing in his early teens, found himself wrestling with the dichotomy of being a 40-something, sometimes-absent father and a touring musician – *Heart Like A Levee* was the result.

The album's writing began in a Washington DC hotel room in January 2015, snow flakes dancing against the window as a powerful storm raged at America's East Coast. It documents a time when Taylor had quit his day job to have one last stab at making his defining album and showing his children that their dad was deserving of a place alongside the musical greats who look down from the covers of the classic albums on the shelves in their house. Ironically, his career was about to hit its high-water mark, just as Taylor was most settled into family life.

"I think things happened when they were supposed to happen," he reflects. "It took me

MC's Martin love began early, and he's been a devotee ever since

© Getty Images



"The first guitar that I connected to in my life – just as an object that was loaded with emotion – was my dad's 1964 Martin D-28. It's still the most beautiful-sounding guitar that I know"

a while to find myself, I guess. I'm just grateful for it all. I try my hardest every day to keep my head down and let art lead the way and have fun. I make a living doing the thing that I love most in the world, and I have to pay attention to my relationship to that thing, to really treat it with care. And my kids get to see their dad do something that he is obsessed with every day. Not every kid gets to see that. I didn't, really. So that's important to me."

Rewind to 2010 and, with his newly born son Elijah slumbering upstairs, Taylor went into his kitchen, placed a cassette recorder on the table, picked up one of his favoured Martin acoustics and recorded the album that first alerted the world to his considerable talents and encyclopaedic knowledge of American guitar music. *Bad Debt* was born in the thick of a Southern winter, its tender reflections on the intricacies and contradictions of faith woven gently in the quiet of a Piedmont night; and it sparked a creatively fertile period in which he would release six albums in as many years.

However, ill fortune was to make one further intervention on Taylor's journey. Originally released on the UK label Blackmaps, most of the copies of *Bad Debt* were destroyed in a warehouse fire caused by the riots in London in 2010, meaning that it never reached the audience it deserved on these shores. The album was eventually re-released in 2014.

The evolution of the Hiss Golden Messenger sound continued through 2011's *Poor Moon*, by now with fleshed-out full-band arrangements. 2013's *Haw* (named after the river that rises in Piedmont country in the north of the state) showcased more ambitious arrangements still. The sweeping strings on *Sufferer (Love My Conqueror)*, wanton Neil Young-like lead playing on *Red Rose Nantahala*, the warming tribute *Sweet As John Hurt* and the gospel feel of *Busted Note* are again shot through with ruminations on the complexities of spirituality.

The 2014 breakthrough, *Lateness Of Dancers*, was a more breezy affair, with guitarist William Tyler, Phil and Brad Cook from North Carolina psych-folk band Megafaun, and Alexandra Sauser-Monnig of Appalachian folk act Mountain Man joining a *Highway 61 Revisited*-era Dylan-style cast of local musicians surrounding the core of Taylor and Hirsch.

It's hard not to perceive Taylor's move to North Carolina as a lightning-bolt moment. It's a state with an incredibly rich musical heritage – Nina Simone, John Coltrane, Blind Boy Fuller, Emmylou Harris, Ben E King, Doc Watson, George Clinton, Earl Scruggs, Thelonious Monk, Ryan Adams and Tori

Amos are just a few of the musicians born there, and Taylor holds his adopted home close to his Californian heart.

"I moved to North Carolina to be closer to the source of the things that I love the most in the United States, so it was an important move," he says. "The South is a beautiful and complicated place with many shades of emotion, and I am so happy to live there. It continues to teach me a lot. Vernacular music of the South – gospel, blues, country, bluegrass, old-time, jazz – it's very important to me. It's the kind of music that speaks to me and engages me with more consistency than almost any other kind. And I've spent a lifetime learning to take what I love about those kinds of music and re-contextualise it in my own music in a way that feels genuine and hopeful and real.

"I have no interest in approaching music academically. I do the things that are most likely to give me goosebumps, that's about the best compass I have. It just so happens that the language that I have at my disposal is often the musical language that comes from around the area in which I live. I'm lucky in that way to live so close to what I consider the fountain of knowledge. And, importantly, so much of the music from the South that I love holds both the light and the dark in its hands at the same time."

That concept of light and dark is a central theme on *Heart Like A Levee*. Its opening track pays more than a passing nod to Dylan's *Tangled Up In Blue*, before the album unfolds into a true connoisseur's scrapbook of American musical history, its dusty pages unfurling to reveal folk, soul, rhythm and blues, funk and gospel compositions of rare

MC's move to North Carolina was the impetus for Hiss Golden Messenger

quality. Indeed, the most relevant comparison to Dylan lies in the similarly stunning and incisive songwriting on display throughout the record.

On the rousing title track, Taylor sings of a "Cincinnati moon, like a wheel in the sky", before musing, "Standing in the wake with the sky still changing. What's it going to take to keep you missing the rambling rake with a heart of obsidian? Standing in the wake with the sky still changing." There's uncertainty and soul-searching throughout, as Taylor throws question after question at the listener – and a loved one: "Will you grieve me, honey? Did I give you a reason to try?".

We ask if being a father, shielding his offspring from the dangers of an increasingly uncertain world, following a year of spiralling existential fear for many of us all over the world, inspired the album? "Those are my feelings of the world in general, regardless of the year," he replies. "Wendell Berry said something like, 'To know the dark, you have to know the light'. There's no night without day, you know? And it feels important to keep reminding myself of that, that the act of being in this world is simultaneously happy and sad, good and bad. You can't have one without the other. I find myself less interested in art that is one-note. I find that I tire of it quickly."

UNFORGETTABLE SOUND

The tone of Martin acoustic guitars runs richly through *Heart Like A Levee*, and the Pennsylvania brand acted as the catalyst that started Taylor's musical journey.

"The first guitar that I connected to in my life – not even as a player, but just as an object that was loaded with emotion – was my dad's 1964 Martin D-28," he remembers. "It still stands as the most beautiful-sounding guitar that I know, though I realise that is in large part for personal reasons. During my whole childhood, he would play that guitar and sing, and it was so soothing to me. It still is, he has a beautiful voice – very different from mine, very pure and clear.

"I generally play Martin 000 guitars because I've always liked the way those smaller bodies project sound"

"I bought my first guitar when I was about 13. But it sat and collected dust for about four years, until I decided that I wanted to actually learn to play. I learned a few chords from my dad and then just kind of picked stuff up along the way.

"I generally play Martin 000 acoustic guitars because I've always liked the way those smaller bodies project sound, and I find that sometimes a bigger body, like a dreadnought, just seems to eat up the note articulation and the detail gets lost. At least the way I play. So smaller guitars seem to work better for me."

That crisp acoustic tone is in full effect on the achingly beautiful album track, *Cracked Windshield*. It has melodic shades of Van Morrison's *Slim Slow Slider*, with Taylor wistfully noting "I can feel October coming on the back-scratch wind". *Like A Mirror Loves A Hammer*, in contrast, breaks free of the album's sense of bucolic serenity, as a filthy fuzzed-up tremolo delivered via Taylor's Silvertone 1448 and a Strymon Flint duels with a rasping saxophone over a devilish funk groove.

It serves as a reminder of Taylor's deep love and understanding of American musical genres through the ages. His home plays host to a vast vinyl collection, and throughout *Heart Like A Levee* his love of North

MC played in hardcore and alt-country bands in LA before Hiss Golden Messenger

American icons such as Dylan, Crosby Stills & Nash, Neil Young, Fleetwood Mac and Wilco resonates. We wonder which guitarists had the most profound effect on Taylor as he was growing up in California.

"There were a lot, I guess," he replies. "Not because of technique, necessarily, but more because of how the instrument was used on the recording. I love the way the acoustic guitars sound on the first CSN record, for instance – very compressed and tactile and funky. There were some guitarists that I really liked when I was young and playing punk-rock – obscure players, mostly, and I was responding to the attitude with, which they played, mostly. Tonie Joy was a guy that played in a lot of bands that I liked at that time.

"I love the way the guitar is used on a record like [The Band's 1968 debut album] *Music From Big Pink*, as sort of a colour instead of a lead instrument. Very ego-less. I'm not much interested in guitar solos, generally. I like players that foreground rhythm, like Curtis Mayfield. Everything he played feels right-on and in the pocket. Phil Upchurch is another one from that school. Jimmy Johnson of The Swampers. Dan Penn. There are a lot..."

Those influences are evident throughout Heart Like A Levee, with Taylor's gently singing Martins and lilting slide riffs placed intelligently on the sonic canvas amid tastefully used strings, saxophone and banjo parts. The production is immaculate, and it's further evidence of Taylor's hard-earned musical maturity that he and Bradley Cook handled it themselves.

"We had a few Martins for the acoustic stuff, some Telecasters, a guitar that Creston Lea in Vermont built for me, a Gallagher Dreadnought from the early 70s, a cheap old Silvertone," says Taylor, recalling the recording sessions in Durham, NC, with a band drawn from Taylor's vast web of contacts in the state's music scene.

"There were a lot of our instruments around, but none of them are stock. Phil Cook – who plays keys and guitar – and I are both always tinkering with our guitars, so everything has unusual pickups, et cetera.

"Our amps are the same. We have a guy that works on our amps in Durham, named Tim Ristau, and Phil and I have both gone really deep with him to create amps that sound the way we want to play.

"In terms of pedals, Phil and I both have Strymon Flint pedals sort of at the core of our rigs, and we both have assorted pedals from Greer Amps in Athens. And then a variety of delays. I always keep a really nice phase on my board because I love what Waylon Jennings did with that effect, and I almost always have my trem pedal on. I'm a huge fan of Pops Staples. Come to think of it, he may be my favourite guitarist."

At the conclusion of this latest part of MC Taylor's musical journey, praise has been fulsome for *Heart Like A Levee* – from both critics and musical contemporaries. One of those contemporaries to publicly declare himself a fan is Taylor's friend Justin Vernon, aka Bon Iver, whose drummer Matt McCaughan plays on the record.

Taylor is about to begin a world tour that will see him criss-cross Europe before returning for an exhaustive victory lap of the US, so we ask whether there's a sense of vindication as such acclaim is lavished on his work – years after lesser artists would have submitted to the obstacles thrown in their path and given up. His response is typically level and considered – light and dark.

"I value the opinion of people that I consider good and kind and deep," he says, "and Justin is all of those things, so I am grateful to him for that.

"I've been making records and touring for the entirety of my adult life, and relatively few people cared until quite recently, so if I need validation I know where to look for it, and it's usually in myself, or from the small circle of people that I hold close."

GABP1603

Subscribe to Guitar & Bass

YES! I would like to subscribe to *Guitar & Bass*

☐ Just £19.45 every 6 issues by Direct Debit – saving 35% (UK only)
(please complete the Direct Debit mandate below)

☐ I wish to purchase a gift subscription
(Please attach gift recipient details on a separate piece of paper)

YOUR DETAILS

Title Forename Surname

Email address **

Address

Postcode Country

Phone number

Mobile**

INSTRUCTION TO YOUR BANK OR BUILDING SOCIETY TO PAY DIRECT DEBIT

Originator's Identification Number
8 3 7 1 8 1

DIRECT Debit

1 Name of your Bank or Building Society

2 Name of account holder(s)

3 Branch sort code ☐☐ ☐☐ ☐☐

4 Account number ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐

5 Instruction to your Bank/Building Society Please pay Anthem

Publishing Direct Debits from the account detailed in this instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with Anthem Publishing and if so, details will be passed electronically to my Bank or Building Society.

Signature(s) Date

DIRECT DEBIT GUARANTEE
Direct Debit is only available in the UK. If you're not entirely satisfied with *Guitar & Bass* at any time during your subscription, you can cancel it and receive a refund for any unmailed copies

OVERSEAS AND OTHER PAYMENTS

☐ **UK** £41.90 for 12 issues – saving 30% (Credit/Debit card)
☐ **Europe** €43.95 for 6 issues – saving 25% (Continuous credit card)
☐ **Rest of World** – £34.75 for 6 issues (Continuous credit card)
☐ **Australia** $74.25 for 6 issues – saving 25% (Continuous credit card)
☐ **USA/Canada** $49.50 for 6 issues – saving 29% (Continuous credit card)

Please debit my card

☐ Visa ☐ Mastercard ☐ Maestro ☐ Am Ex

☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐

Valid from ☐☐ ☐☐ Expiry date ☐☐ ☐☐ Issue no ☐☐

Signature(s) Date

Send your completed form to **Anthem Publishing Ltd, Freepost RRBS-LRRG-CTBJ, 800 Guillat Avenue, Kent Science Park, Sittingbourne ME9 8GU**

Your subscription will start with the next available issue.
There are 12 issues in a year.

*The 35% discount is only available to UK subscribers paying by Direct Debit only. UK, Europe, and Australia savings are calculated against the cover price x 12 issues. ROW savings cannot be calculated (cover prices vary from region to region).

**Please enter this information so that Anthem Publishing Ltd can keep you informed of newsletters, special offers and promotions via email or free text messages. You may unsubscribe from these messages at any time.

Anthem Publishing Ltd, publisher of *Guitar & Bass* magazine, may contact you with details of our products, services or to undertake research. Please tick here if you prefer not to receive such information by post ☐ phone ☐.

We occasionally pass your details on to carefully selected companies whose products and services we feel may be of interest to you. Please tick here if you prefer not to receive such information by post ☐ phone ☐

"Guitar & Bass is packed to the rafters with even more of the things that you love. Subscribe today to be the first to read the best gear reviews in the business, check out money-saving DIY Workshop features, read the stories behind beautiful vintage instruments and killer collections, gain valuable insights from your favourite guitarists and bassists and sharpen your playing and your knowledge courtesy of our expanded tutorial section. Make sure you never miss an issue – subscribe now to save 35%"

Chris Vinnicombe
Editor

Great reasons to subscribe today!

- Save 35% on the shop price*
- Pay just £19.45 every 6 issues on Direct Debit
- Never miss an issue
- Free UK delivery direct to your door

*Available to UK Direct Debit orders only. See order form for overseas pricing

Guitar & Bass

Save 35%

when you subscribe today!

3 *easy ways* to subscribe

anthem.subscribeonline.co.uk/guitarandbass
Entering code **GABP1603**

0844 322 1291*
Overseas readers **+44 1795 414 781**
(Overseas readers +44 (0) 1795 414 781)
Quoting code **GABP1603**

Please complete the order form opposite

*Calls cost 7 pence per minute plus your phone company's access charge.

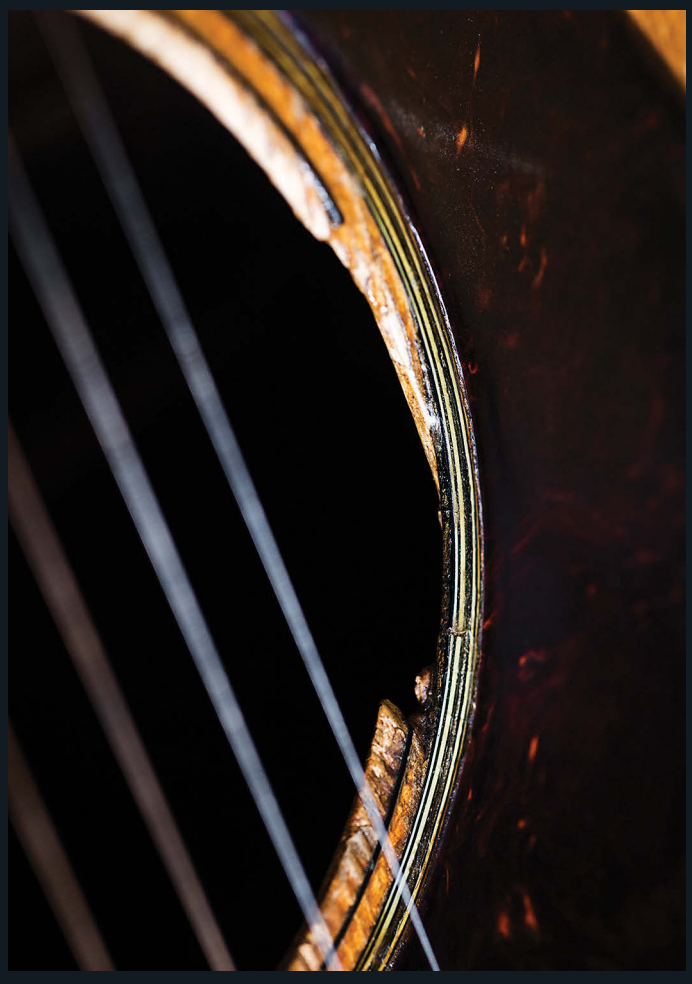
MUSEUM PIECE

D-18 'Grandpa'

Kurt Cobain & Elliott Smith

(1953, serial 132933)

This well-worn D-18 was given to Kurt Cobain in 1991, by indie-folk musician Mary Lou Lord. The Nirvana frontman is believed to have christened the guitar 'Grandpa', due to its resemblance to a curmudgeonly old man. It was later returned to Lord, who also loaned it to Portland troubadour, Elliott Smith. 'Grandpa' now resides at the Martin Museum, along with the left-handed nut and bridge it sported while Cobain was its custodian.



Martin&Co.
EST. 18

DIY WORKSHOP

ESSENTIAL MARTIN MAINTENANCE TIPS

If you take good care of it, your Martin will last a lifetime – Huw Price shares some handy maintenance tips to help keep your pride and joy in tip-top condition

Whether it's is a well-loved veteran, a pristine vintage classic or a shiny new guitar straight out of Nazareth, keeping your Martin in good shape is important to ensure that you and your acoustic have a long and fulfilling relationship. Over the following pages, *G&B*'s resident expert, Huw Price, shares some essential tips for cleaning and maintaining your Martin to ensure that it continues looking and sounding its best for many years to come...

String things

Don't allow yourself to get hung up on using the same type of strings on every acoustic. With such a range of tonewoods, body sizes and bracing styles, it would be tantamount to using just one type of pickup on every electric guitar irrespective of body style, shape or size. There are plenty of gauges, alloys and coatings to consider, so have fun discovering what works for you and your guitar.

However it's key to understand that the strings must be suitable for the guitar. With electrics you can use any gauge (within reason) and the only compromises will be tone and playability. With acoustics there are structural considerations that should guide your choice.

For instance, vintage-style Martins with scalloped bracing are not designed to withstand the tension of extremely heavy strings and even 0.012-gauge sets could be pushing it. You may observe the area behind the bridge bulging upwards, which is sometimes referred to as a 'belly'. Some bellying is normal and indeed preferable, however excessive bellying as a result of excessive string pull will raise the bridge and twist it forwards. String action will increase as a consequence, and it may permanently distort the geometry of the guitar if you persist with heavy gauge strings.

Conversely the more robustly constructed Martins with non-scalloped bracing may lack volume and projection if a string set is too light. Sometimes a heavier set will drive the top harder and help to bring out a guitar's voice. Also remember that the OM scale is longer than the 000 scale, so you and your guitar may be fine going up a gauge with a shorter scale length.

Pin neat

After going through hundreds of restringing cycles, your Martin's bridge pins can show signs of wear. For optimum tone and stable tuning, it's essential that the strings are firmly anchored at the ball end and if you're noticing pins creeping upwards when strings are tuned to full tension, it might be time to consider pin replacement. But be warned, because it might be that the string holes in the bridge are getting a bit worn, too – new pins won't necessarily fix that.

When shopping for pins, you might consider an upgrade – especially if the originals are plastic. It's generally accepted that bridge pins impact tone, so do some research and check online demos to determine the material that might be best for your guitar. For instance a set of ebony pins might smooth brash treble, bone pins may provide extra brightness and complexity, while brass may enhance body, sustain and harmonic overtones.

Vintage-style Martin pegs may not have string grooves cut into them, however the vast majority will and the groove should be oriented towards the bridge for the string to sit in the channel. The pegs should not necessarily sit flush with the top of the bridge and never try to force them all the way in if it's a tight fit because you risk splitting the bridge. When replacing bridge pins, measure the diameter of the originals to establish the size and taper you need and have fun with this cheap and easy modification.

Light relief

If you fret a string at the first and 12th fret simultaneously, you should be able to see a very slight gap between the top of the seventh fret and the bottom of the string. This indicates that the neck has a slight up-bow and the gap is referred to as the neck relief. Some neck relief is desirable.

If the gap is greater than 0.5mm or so, the action will probably feel too high and the guitar might feel tough to play. If there's no neck relief – or worse still a back bow – the strings will be too low and the guitar will probably produce a lot of unwelcome buzzes and rattles.

This is why guitar necks have adjustable truss rods. Some truss rods work only in one direction to stiffen the neck and reduce

It's generally accepted that bridge pins impact tone, so do some research to determine the material that might be best for your guitar

Different types of strings can have a huge impact on the tone of your guitar

up-bow. Two-way truss rods also allow you to reduce neck stiffness and increase relief. On acoustic guitars truss rod access can be achieved either behind the nut or inside the body. Martin truss rods are always accessed through the soundhole and a small hole drilled in the lateral brace adjacent to it.

Neck relief will usually change when you use a different string gauge and necks are also prone to movement when seasons change. Adjustments are usually quick and easy, but they should be entrusted to a professional if you're not entirely sure how it should be done.

Although adjustable truss rods have been commonplace throughout the guitar industry since the middle of the last century, Martin persisted with nonadjustable truss rods until 1985. Initially, the adoption of steel strings led to the introduction of an ebony rod in the neck for extra stiffness and by the 1930s Martin was using a steel bar with a 'T' cross section. This lasted until the 1960s when Martin changed to a square steel tube.

So, if you have a pre-1985 Martin with an unsatisfactory neck relief, are you well and truly stuffed? The answer is probably not, but you will need to consult a really good guitar tech. Various corrective techniques are proposed, including introducing relief by reducing fret height in the middle of the neck and even removing the frets to plane some relief into the fingerboard.

However, the traditional solution is called 'compression fretting' and by using fret wire with tangs slightly wider than the fret slots, a skilled luthier can remedy an up-bow and even induce a back-bow. Fortunately, vintage Martin necks are renowned for their stiffness and rigidity, and relief problems are rare with nonadjustable truss rod necks.

Oh the humidity

All wood has moisture content and it shrinks and expands as it dries out and rehydrates. When guitars get very dry, the shrinkage can be sufficient to crack the wood. Obviously it's desirable to avoid cracks so care must be taken with solid wood guitars to prevent them from drying out.

Martin's published guidelines recommend maintaining your guitar's humidity

If you're experimenting with different strings, Martin's own options are a good starting point

A gap between neck heel and body can be the sign of a failing neck joint

level between 45 and 55 percent within a temperature range of 22 to 25°C. Rapid temperature changes are also discouraged so if you fly with your guitar or bring it indoors after it has been in a freezing tour van all night, allow it to come up to room temperature slowly before opening the case.

Too much humidity increases the wood's moisture content, which causes it to expand. Over-hydrated wood may not sound its best but in isolation a high moisture content shouldn't be an issue. However Martin states, "when very high humidity is combined with high temperature, glue joints could possibly become weakened and may even open slightly. If your instrument is exposed to high temperature or humidity for any length of time, the glue under the bridge could weaken causing the bridge to pull off". This is also why soundboard cracks along the glue joint in the area behind the bridge are commonplace.

Much of this is common sense and few would consider it wise to keep an acoustic guitar next to a radiator, an electric heater, an open fire or wood burning stove. Rapid humidity changes are as undesirable as temperature extremes because the rate of moisture loss will not be consistent, which increases the danger of cracks opening and joints failing.

Fortunately, specialist guitar humidifiers are readily available and very affordable. Martin markets its own, but they're all designed for the same purpose and you simply need to follow the instructions. If you do need to re-humidify an instrument, it might be best to do so with the guitar sealed in its case.

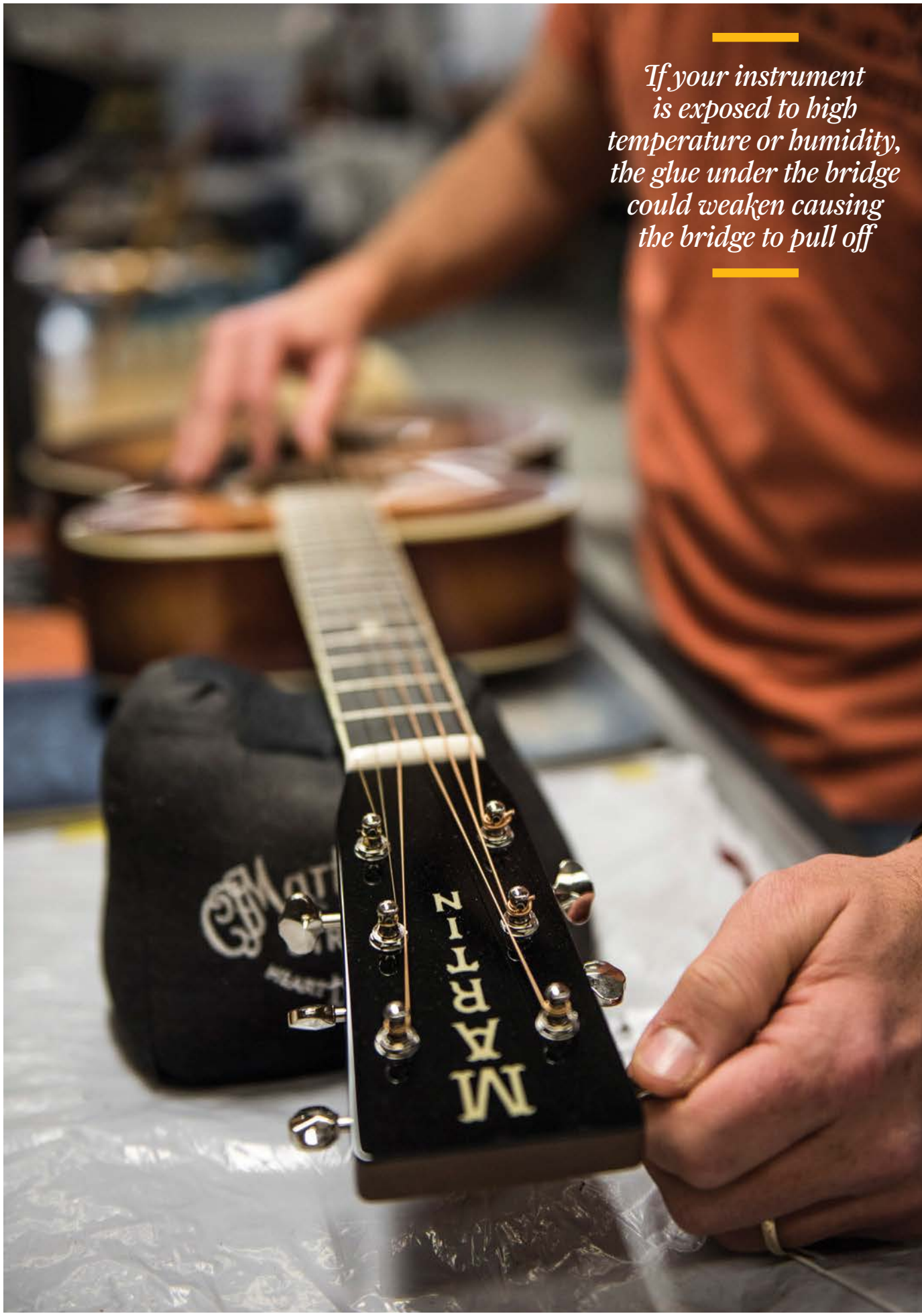
Clean pickings

Guitar cleaning should begin by removing and dust or particles from the finish using a brush or a soft dry cloth. This is advisable because some particles may be abrasive enough to scratch the finish. Once everything has been removed you can think about polishing or cleaning the finish. In a sense the two are different so let's make the distinction.

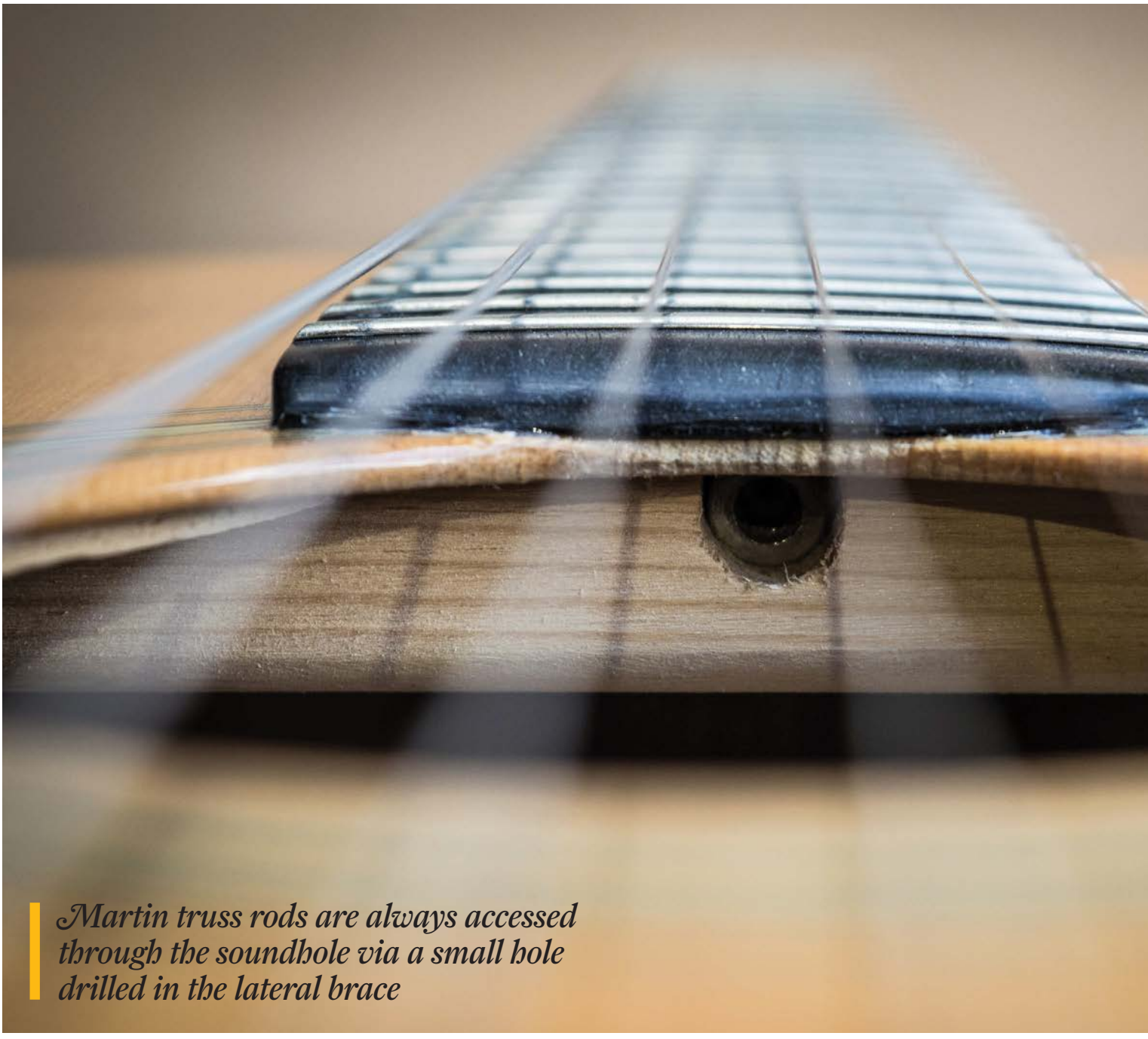
Some finishes are porous, and over time grease and dirt can get into the finish to make it look dull or cloudy. In more extreme cases this type of ingress on the back of the neck can create a tacky feel that seems to get worse after you have been playing for a while. Any cleaning process should focus on removing this ingrained gunk to restore the look and feel of the guitar.

Sometimes the dirt will simply be confined to the outer surface of the finish, so polishing the finish might be deemed sufficient rather than a deep clean. However beware of matt and satin finishes because polishing them can result in a blotchy and uneven sheen – avoid polishing them altogether.

Before cleaning or polishing your guitar it's worth finding out what type of finish



If your instrument is exposed to high temperature or humidity, the glue under the bridge could weaken causing the bridge to pull off



Martin truss rods are always accessed through the soundhole via a small hole drilled in the lateral brace

it has because certain cleaning products may harm it. As a general rule of thumb all abrasive cleaning products should be avoided irrespective of the type of finish. Some modern finishes are used to lower costs and protect manufacturers from warranty claims rather than for their tonal qualities.

If your guitar has a shiny and thick gloss coating of polyurethane, polyester or epoxy, it will probably outlast the guitar. Since it's pretty much impervious, you can buff it up with any old spray polish you might find in the cupboard and a soft cotton cloth.

For guitars with nitrocellulose finishes, like high end Martins, more care needs to be taken because it's porous. Some cleaning products can impregnate the finish and stay there after you have buffed off the excess. Although they're more expensive, specialist guitar polishes and cleaners are probably your safest bet.

Martin's own Polish and Cleaner product is suitable for gloss nitro finishes. You can use regular naphtha to lift out dirt, but I have found Virtuoso Premium Cleaner to be more effective and I always follow up with Virtuoso Premium Polish. Another generally accepted recommendation is to avoid cleaning products that contain silicone.

Passing the joint

There's a reason that Martin sprays necks and bodies separately before gluing them together. Martin has always built guitars to last a lifetime – or indeed several lifetimes – and has long understood that all necks with traditional dovetail joints will eventually need to be re-set. Applying finish before the glue means the neck and body can be separated and re-joined without any need to repair the finish, too.

Far from being a structural weakness, the potential for disassembly, repair and reassembly is commonplace in high-end acoustic instrument manufacturing. In fact it's regarded as fairly routine throughout the violin family of instruments and animal protein glue is preferred because it sets crystal hard but releases when sufficient heat is applied.

So how can you tell if your Martin needs a neck reset? The most obvious giveaway that something has moved, or is starting to move, is that string action will creep higher. If you've recently gone up a string gauge or the weather has changed, look at the area behind the bridge to see if it is belling more than it was previously. Also check your neck relief because normal service may be resumed with

A new saddle can be just the ticket if your action is troublesome

a quick truss rod tweak. If adjusting the truss rod and returning to your usual string gauge doesn't help, it's an indication that the issues go deeper.

Take a long straight edge ruler and run it along the top of the frets to the bridge. With the back of the ruler pressed against the frets, the front edge should float 1/16 inches or so above the top of the bridge. If it's level with the bridge top or even below, it may be neck reset time. There are two factors at play – changing guitar geometry and or joint failure. So let's look at both in turn and run through a checklist to help us determine where the problems are.

Continual string pull will distort a guitar's geometry over the years. The top can be forced downwards on the fingerboard side of the soundhole and the bridge can belly up and tilt forwards. These changes will raise the action, too, and although the neck joint itself may be sound, a neck reset will be needed to increase back angle because it's the only way to compensate for changes within the guitar and lower the action.

Telltale signs of a failing neck joint are gaps between the heel and the body. Since the string tension pulls the neck forwards and the neck joint is the pivot point, the gap will usually start out in the vicinity of the heel cap. Fortunately gaps are usually easy to see, so a failing neck joint can be easier to diagnose than shifting body geometry.

Also sight along the edge of the fingerboard to check the fingerboard extension from the body joint to the soundhole. It should tilt downwards slightly or, at the very worst, be level with the rest of the board. If the fingerboard extension ramps upwards, a neck reset is almost certainly needed.

This should be well within the skill set of a professional luthier, however neck resets should not be undertaken lightly and there's no point to having one done if the cause of any problems lies elsewhere. With that in mind, you may be able to restore perfect playability by shaving the top of the saddle – assuming there's sufficient saddle material above the top of the bridge.

Most older guitars will have had their saddles lowered and sometimes bridges are thinned in order to avoid having a neck reset. With Martins, a neck reset is always preferable to bridge shaving and a proper neck angle optimises tone and playability. However having a neck reset pretty much guarantees that you'll need a new saddle, too.

Raising saddles

Various materials are being used for bridge saddles these days and many modern Martins are equipped with Tusq. Higher end acoustics – including Martins – very often come with bone saddles. Debate rages about the tonal qualities of these materials and the subject would almost certainly warrant an entire article, however I'll restrict myself to one observation. In my experience I have never known an acoustic guitar to sound worse after a factory fitted synthetic saddle has been replaced with bone.

Regardless of the material, there are some rules when it comes to bridge saddles. If you ever see a second hand guitar – or indeed a new one – with only a 1/16-inch or so of saddle height poking above the bridge, you should be suspicious.

The saddle could be low because the neck joint is failing, the body has begun to distort or the builder didn't get the neck angle right in the first place. If the guitar is structurally sound and the neck angle is good, but the action is way too low, it may be a poorly made saddle. Unfortunately that is the least likely scenario and a very low saddle means there's no potential to lower the action.

Some saddle height is needed to achieve a decent break angle between the saddle and the bridge pins and ideally you should be looking for somewhere between 1/8th and a 1/4 of a

It will take a little longer, but the gentlest way to get the detritus off your fingerboard is to use a specialist cleaner

inch. This prevents the strings from sliding around on top of the saddle and ensures that there will be no string buzzing from behind the saddle. The height also ensures that the strings exert sufficient downward pressure on the saddle. This is important because acoustic guitars work by transferring the energy of vibrating strings to the soundboard. A lower saddle means there's less downward pressure and therefore energy isn't transferred as efficiently as it could be.

Lastly the strings need a clean takeoff point from the top of the saddle to ring true. So if the top of the saddle looks like a flat surface, it needs to be rounded over – just like profiling frets. With compensated saddles you may see the saddle filed and sanded to sharp points, but the principle is the same.

Wiping the board

Many modern Martin guitars come with Richlite fingerboards – a man-made material comprised of resin-infused paper. With its uniform jet black appearance, it's a dead ringer for ebony and some luthiers believe it could eventually replace ebony in large-scale guitar production. Like wood, Richlite can get dirty but it's easy to clean. Martin recommends wiping it down with a soft damp cloth and avoiding the use of any chemicals and fingerboard conditioners.

Martin is more widely known for ebony and rosewood fingerboards. Ebony was mostly reserved for the more upmarket models and until the 1960s Brazilian rosewood would have been the 'cheaper' option. Since then Martin has been using Indian rosewood.

Periodically, most fingerboards will benefit from being cleaned. Inevitably there will be a build up of finger grease, dead skin and goodness knows what else on the surface. It can build up and become impacted, which makes it harder to remove. Some prefer to start by scraping the gunk off using the edge of a credit card or even a Stanley blade scraper, but avoid the latter unless you are experienced and skilled.

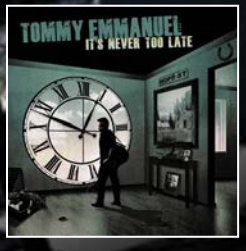
Others eschew scraping and wipe the fingerboard down with naphtha (aka lighter fluid) squirted onto kitchen paper. It takes longer but it will lift off the detritus without removing any wood. Some warn that naphtha can damage the finish and dry out the wood, but we've never experienced anything untoward with nitrocellulose finishes.

It will take a little longer again, but the gentlest way to get the detritus off is to use a specialist fingerboard cleaner such as Dunlop lemon oil. You can also apply it after cleaning with naphtha to prevent the board from drying out. Simply wipe it on, allow it to sink into the wood for several minutes then wipe off the excess and buff up the board with a clean cloth. Cleaning of this sort shouldn't be necessary at every string change and two or three times per year will probably suffice. Now get playing!

STRINGS PERFECT FOR PLAYERS

FROM BEGINNERS TO HARDCORE PROFESSIONALS

TO FINGERSTYLE GODS.



TOMMY EMMANUEL
It's Never Too Late
tommyemmanuel.com

#staytuned
martinstrings.com/FlexcoreSP

C.F. Martin & Co.®
EST. 1833

THE 17 SERIES

Black Smoke & Whiskey Sunset

MARTINGUITAR.COM